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JUNE 5 1981

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BIOGRAPHY

The tough guy at the typewriter

By Julian Symons

RICHARD LAYMAN:

Shadow Man: The Life of Dashiell Hammett
267pp. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
\$14.95.

JERRY SPIER:

Raymond Chandler
166pp. Frederick Ungar.
\$8.95.

Lives of crime writers mostly remind us that more lively hours may be spent in reading their books, but there are exceptions, the most conspicuous of them being Dashiell Hammett. According to the legend, Hammett turned his own life into fiction. His years as a Pinkerton detective were the basis of the Continental Op stories, and Hammett himself was the origin first of Sam Spade, and later of the hard-boiled Nick Charles in *The Thin Man*. Lillian Hellman helped to create this legendary Hammett in her romantic accounts of their intermittent life together over thirty years, like the story of their first meeting in a Hollywood restaurant, when he was recovering from a long drinking session. "The five-day drunk had left the wonderful face looking crumpled, and the very tall thin figure was tired and sagged. We... went and sat in his car and talked to each other and over each other until it was daylight." That is Nick Charles Hammett, who may also be glimpsed in the film *Julia*. Sam Spade Hammett can be found in Joe Gore's *Hammett*, which offers a sometimes ingenious fictional reconstruction of Hammett's life in San Francisco.

This legendary Hammett existed, although he was not the whole man. As his friend the screen writer Nunnally Johnson wrote to me: "From the day I met Hammett, in the late Twenties, his behaviour could be accounted for only by an assumption that he had no expectation of being alive much beyond Thursday. Even allowing for the exuberance of youthfulness and the headiness of the writer's approach of success, not to mention the defiance of the Twenties, an one could have spent himself and his money with such recklessness as to expect to be alive much longer." But this was a misapprehension by Hammett, akin to Dylan Thomas's belief to his early twenties that he would not live more than a few months. To quote Johnson again: "Lustily friends, sickened and dead, and Hammett, for whom we all had a deep sigh every other day, survived. When the day approached it was thirty years later that he had expected it, and Death owed him a genuine apology when eventually it made its tardy appearance." Yet Johnson's account is romantically exaggerated, as Richard Layman's *Shadow Man: The Life of Dashiell Hammett* makes plain. The work of this first biography of Hammett (William F. Nolan's *Dashiell Hammett: A Casebook*, published in 1968, was no more in biographical terms than an informative sketch) is its factual quality. It has been written without bias or hindsight from Lillian Hellman, and is a superb piece of bar estimation, written about Hammett without her assistance. Mr Layman does not doubt, but tends to deflate. The thin man's life was wonderful, but he had had his.

The story of Hammett's life is dramatic and tragic enough. He was born in Maryland in 1894, the son of a heavy, brawny, hard-drinking man who never had much success in the police force, and then a streetcar conductor, clerk, and apparently a door-to-door salesman of seafood. Dashiell, the eldest of three children, was the youngest, which was soon given up. Father and son got on badly. When his father died many years later Hammett held for the funeral

but refused to attend it. By the time the young man was twenty he had left or lost half-a-dozen jobs, started to drink, and caught a dose of clap. At twenty-one he took a job as a Pinkerton detective, and held it for three years until he joined the Army in 1918. He went back to Pinkerton's after his discharge a year later but was now a sick man, troubled by the tuberculosis that affected him for the rest of his life. In October 1920 he was admitted to a public health hospital, weighing no more than 130lbs, and was immediately classed as 100 per cent disabled. He emerged several months later, patched up but not cured and with his pension cut by half, worked for Pinkerton's San Francisco office, and gave up his job as a detective finally at the end of 1921.

In later years Hammett played up his work as a Pinkerton man, and played down his illness. Mr Layman casts doubt on Hammett's connection with the four big cases he claimed to have worked on, but he must have been good at the job to have been so readily re-engaged by the agency when obviously a sick man. During almost the whole of the 1920s he was wretchedly, although intermittently, ill. He had married Jose, a nurse at the hospital, they had a small daughter, and "lived a simple life punctuated by the struggle to meet their mounting bills." When his daughter Mary Jane was born, Hammett slept in the hall of their apartment because he had been told that he might infect the baby.

It was in these miserable circumstances that he began to write short stories. By 1925 he was selling up to twenty stories a year to the pulp magazines that had become popular in the early years of the decade, but according to Mr Layman was "barely getting by" financially. He took a job as a copywriter for a San Francisco jewellery firm, but within a few months collapsed at work, and was found lying in a pool of blood. He now had another daughter, his recovery was slow (he was on 100 per cent disability pension again), and Jose took the children to live in the country for the sake of economy. Her departure marked the effective end of their marriage. Success was round the corner, and he was about to enter the world in which Lillian Hellman and Nunnally Johnson knew him.

His first book, *Red Harvest*, originally called "The Cleansing of Poisonville", appeared early in 1929. *The Dain Curse* in July, *The Maltese Falcon* early in the following year. They had been written for serial publication in *Black Mask*, but it was not until *Black Mask* that Hammett's fame began to spread. The praise of *The Maltese Falcon* as "the best detective story America has yet produced" was typical. The chorus was, and to a large extent remains, American. In Britain, Hammett has

never been regarded so highly as Raymond Chandler.

With fame came the call to Hollywood, the immensely heavy drinking, the long-lasting affair with Hellman (although other women were not neglected), money given, and at times almost thrown away. He wrote two more books, *The Glass Key* (1931) and *The Thin Man* (1934), but afterwards there were only book titles. He provided original stories for some "Thin Man" films, and had his name on a comic strip for a few months end that was all. He was given a \$1000 dollars-a-week contract by MGM as general editorial adviser, and although three times taken off the payroll for "simply disappearing while a movie he was involved with was being shot", he was hired again each time. In the mid-1930s his income was about \$100,000 a year, yet it did not quite match his expenditure. He lived in a Beverly Hills penthouse or in the Harold Lloyd mansion, leased a limousine and hired a chauffeur. He was in great demand at parties, and much praised by intellectuals. Maltese called him the technical link between Dreiser and Hemingway. Gide said that the dialogue of *Red Harvest* gave pointers to Hemingway and Faulkner. The praise did not deceive him. He knew that his last book showed a marked decline, and wrote to Hellman about Nick and Nora Charles: "Maybe there are better writers in the world, but nobody ever invented a more insufferably smug pair of characters".

The last phase of his career began with his enrolment in the US Army in September, 1942, to serve in the Signal Corps. He was sent to the barren volcanic island of Adak in Alaska, where he edited a camp newspaper, and was part-author of a booklet on the war against the Japanese in the Aleutians. He was much liked by the young soldiers, who called him Pop. As Mr Layman says, it is astonishing that he was ever accepted for military service. He was forty-eight years old, tuberculosis still troubled him at times, his teeth were very bad (he was rejected once because of them), and after the Spanish Civil War began he seemed to have given public support to almost any Left-wing cause that asked for it, so that he was politically suspect. The FBI started a file on him, and said that his support for Communist or Communist front organizations amounted to \$1000 a month. The Bureau's investigations were so inept that for two years they were unable to confirm that he was in the Army, and when they finally did, he had been seen in uniform, considered bringing charges against him for impersonating a US soldier. After his discharge in September 1945 "his primary activities were drinking and reading", but the money kept coming in, now chiefly for radio serials. Late in 1948 his health broke down again,

and he was told by the doctor that if he did not give up drinking he would be dead in a few months. On that day he became an abstainer.

In 1951 he was brought before a US Court to testify regarding a bail fund instituted by the Civil Rights Congress. Hammett was Chairman of the Congress, four Communist leaders for whom bail had been posted failed to surrender to the authorities, and the Court asked Hammett for the names of the contributors in the fund, and about other matters. His testimony, in which he consistently pleaded the Fifth Amendment, is printed here in full, and his stone-calling does not justify the heroic gloss put on the episode in Hellman's reminiscences. He was sentenced to six months' imprisonment, served five of them, and said afterwards that going to prison was like going home.

It is far from certain that he understood the ruinous nature of his decision. When he came out of prison he found his radio shows cancelled, and his income attached by the Internal Revenue Service. His books were out of print and remained so, since any money from them would have gone to pay back taxes, so that he refused permission to reprint them. The last ten years of his life were spent in a cottage twenty miles north of Manhattan, lent him rent-free by a politically sympathetic doctor. Here he read a great deal, but wrote nothing. Interviewed in 1957 by the FBI, he told them truthfully that he was "essentially without income". To a journalist from the *Washington Post* he said that he kept three typewriters in the cottage "chiefly to remind myself that I was once a writer". Asked why he had stopped writing he said that he found he was repeating himself. "It is the beginning of the end when you discover you have style". In these last years he refused to see even old friends, with the exception of Lillian Hellman. He died in January 1961, killed not by the tuberculosis that had haunted him throughout his adult life, but by cancer. Dorothy Parker, Leonard Bernstein and Lionel Trilling were among those who attended the funeral service, and Hellman delivered a eulogy.

The American crime story (distinct from the detective story) has produced three writers of great talent. Hammett, Chandler and Ross Macdonald, and a comparison between Hammett's and Chandler's lives and talents is prompted by this biography. There are some similarities. Success came late to both men, to Chandler much later than Hammett; both went to Hollywood and disliked a lot of what they saw; both drank hard and could be quarrelsome or rude. But the differences are much greater, and it is difficult not to conclude, after looking again at Frank MacShane's thorough biography of Chandler, that Hammett did what Chandler only wrote about.

Jerry Spier, in *Raymond Chandler*, a useful guide to Chandler's work and ideas, deprecates the view that Chandler "married his mother", but the interpretation seems reasonable in relation to a man who lived with his mother until she died and then, at the age of thirty-six, married a woman eighteen years older than himself. Hammett might have seduced a nymph but he would never have married his mother. He was a hard man, hard particularly on himself and what he had failed to do. Chandler would not have been capable of that remark about the smugness of Nick and Nora Charles. He loved his own creations too much for that.

The differences show in the writing. Hammett's style was, almost from the beginning, original, bony, drained of colour, lacking delicacy but full of power, a perfect style for describing violent action without moral comment. It is true that at its beginning this was pretty well all he could do. As Richard Layman perceptively says, the "hard-boiled" fiction in *Black Mask* sprang from the naturalistic writing of Dreiser and Frank Norris, but "departed from

The Victorian Marital Murders

Most wished their partners dead and many wished them different - some wildly clobbered on the head, arched over a cliff, rent by the sharp and envious knives heaved by the husbands or the wives.

paid prices for imperfect love. By pillow or by poison they made complaint in days when 'dove' and 'wallow' were pool stuff and commonplace before the Muse's silly face.

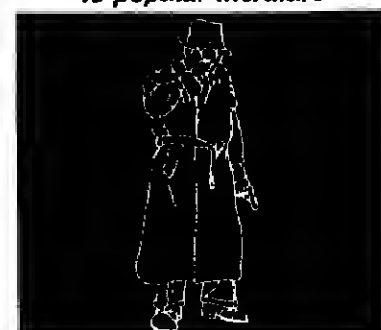
They cut with axe and saw the bodies that they hated or bashed their screaming faces raw, their union celebrated by contrast of a killing kind - the pool, however, they could find.

Gavin Ewart

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John M. Reilly

painted him warts and all and followed up some of the hidden threads in his story. She is a careful historian but not a natural biographer. Taylor's few pages on Morel are still worth re-reading to catch the spirit of the man. More important, for Professor Cline has done a job which needed doing, she might have used the wealth of recent secondary material to have moved out from her rather restricted canvas. The book's sub-title, "strategies of protest", suggests a study of Morel's techniques of mass mobilization and an assessment of the effectiveness of his campaigns. Professor Cline rightly stresses the single-minded concentration and the journalistic and organizational talents of her subject, but she is rarely drawn to comment on the characteristics of a period which saw the proliferation of pressure-groups within the foreign policy complex both on the left and the right (the terms are somewhat inappropriate) and in other countries as well as in Britain. Morel played a central role in enlisting groups which were just coming to political prominence at a time of shifting domestic and foreign concerns. His perceptions, methods and success (the marriage between the UDC and Labour party is a case in point) could tell us far more about these critical years than Professor Cline offers.

Is this the success story Taylor sketched in *The Trouble Makers*? Morel created movements which could not be disregarded yet he failed to achieve his ultimate goals. The UDC reached its height in a period when the outbreak of war had tarnished the reputation of the diplomats and when, its grim realities had discredited the techniques of the "old diplomacy", clipped not by parliament, nor the

people, but by the prime minister, the service departments and the Treasury. This was not the revolution demanded by Morel. The Foreign Office countered his demands for democratization by re-asserting the need for professionalism and isolation from the dangerous currents of ignorant public opinion. They argued that the management of foreign affairs, a delicate business at best, must be left to the experts. After the war, the reformers intended to make the Office more effective and better prepared to handle the wider range of responsibilities permanently placed on the diplomatic map. Even these voices were stifled with the "return to normalcy" and the drive for economy. The League (Morel's *bête noire*, among others) inherited the mantle of the UDC. The Foreign Office viewed its activities in the same light as Morel's campaigns.

Morel proclaimed the evils of the past and present but offered little positive guidance for the future. He was a true disseater but not really a visionary. And in the end, he was defeated. Many were converted to his version of the wickedness of the diplomats but the system of diplomacy remained entrenched. The campaign for the democratic control of diplomacy goes on still, the recent creation of a Foreign and Commonwealth Commons select committee is but one more chapter in a long story. Outside parliament, it has proved to be an uphill battle to mobilize dissent in order to effect changes in foreign policy. The instances of success have been surprisingly few. Herein lies the reason why the "trouble makers" attract historical defenders and why one wishes Professor Cline had written a more ambitious book.



"Celia in an armchair", a lithograph in an edition of 74, portraying Celia Birtwell, (1890, 40x43 ins) is included in "Celia Flowers", on exhibition at the Knoedler Gallery, 22 Cork St, London W1 until June 20 of all David Hockney's lithographs and aquatints of these two subjects from 1963-1980.

Ordering the New World

By Peter Marshall

DAVID GRAYSON ALLEN:
In English Ways

The Movement of Societies and the Transfer of English Local Law and Custom to Massachusetts Bay in the Seventeenth Century
312pp. University of North Carolina Press. \$27.
0 9087 1448 2

ALICE HANSON JONES:
Wealth of a Nation To Be

The American Colonies on the Eve of the Revolution
494pp. Columbia University Press. \$31.25.
0 231 03659 0

American history has been commonly seen to record a process of development clearly distinct from that which was occurring in contemporary Europe: if the colonies of settlement enjoyed, in their early years, fewer material benefits, their subsequent progress was both more rapid and, even more significantly, shared by a greater part of their population, than proved the case in the mother country. Over the years economic success, social cohesion, and political commitment provided essential components of an advance to nationhood. How far these factors should be regarded as fundamental and deliberate agents of change, how far they should be considered as no more than the incidental and pragmatic acquisitions of circumstance, are topics which historians have debated for many years. As the evidence mounts, so does the doubt. Studies of unquestioned merit leave the matter far from resolved.

David Grayson Allen's investigation is both intensive and limited, being devoted to a study of the origins and nature of the settlement in the seventeenth century of five Massachusetts towns. His comparison of practices in the parts of England from which the migrants originated, with those established as bases of the new developments, leads him to conclude that past circumstances exerted specific influences upon later endeavours, until the inhabitants had essentially reproduced what they wanted - the ordering of life as they knew it before their emigration. Under this searching scrutiny the hypothesis of Frederick Jackson Turner - that the frontier process stimulated the growth of a uniquely American society in the New World - appears further repudiated. Neither in the more equitable distribu-

tion of property nor of popular access to political office did the five towns display any dramatic lurch towards the creation of material and civic equality. In the later years of the colonial period the growth of colonial institutions and the consequent reduction of local autonomy is seen to be marked, in these five instances, by the installation of forms of government resembling those of eighteenth-century England rather than demonstrating the emergence of a new social order. In this account, continuity would seem to receive greater emphasis than change.

Dr Allen is not alone in reaching such conclusions, for his analysis of migration and settlement can be seen as inquiring in detail into the condition which T. H. Breen has entitled "Persistent Localism". Total agreement on the factors forming and sustaining the Old World presence in the New is not to be found in their accounts: Breen lays emphasis on the impress of recent English political and religious events while Allen stresses the impact of economic and social circumstances. Both agree, however, that in the shaping of these new societies novelty was not the aim: it is an argument which, no matter how skillfully deployed, will be by some found unacceptable, or qualified by those who believe that, in the longer term, general change can be demonstrated and its causes traced to the earliest days of settlement. But how long must the longer term be? Can the transformation be found to have occurred during the colonial period of American history?

The degree to which the social and economic structure of American life had developed and changed by the eve of the Revolution has been assessed by Alice Hanson Jones. Her study of the material wealth of the colonies marks the completion of a doctoral dissertation which the demands of private life and the pursuit of a limited professional career had halted for some thirty years. There are strong grounds for gratitude at her persistence, and reason to believe that the enforced delay may have conferred benefits: the value of this analysis resides not only in findings which may well establish in detail what many may have believed, without evidence, to have been the case, but particularly in the clarity with which the means of investigation are set out, a quality not always evident in the work of younger scholars.

The extent, nature, and distribution of colonial wealth has been examined by Professor Jones through the analysis of estates registered in 1774 for probate in sample counties of New England, the Middle Col-

onies, and the South. It is shown, as might be expected, that slaves first place to the South, agricultural products gained a distant second place for the Middle Colonies; New England formed the poorest region, benefiting somewhat from its commercial shipping, and isolated industrial activities. Where Professor Jones's findings are of great interest, however, is in their assignment of wealth among the population of the colonies: the richest 10 per cent of those whose estates were valued in 1774 held almost 55 per cent of the total funds - a slightly higher percentage in New England, somewhat less in the South, even including the assets of slavery, and less than still 42 per cent, in the Middle Colonies. From these figures it is clear that while the Revolution may have waged for notions of political equality it did not spring from comparable social and economic conditions. Though circumstances were no way egalitarian, such estimates are possible suggest to Professor Jones that the wealth of the colonies had become, *per capita*, if not great, at least not startlingly less than that of the mother country.

These studies, separated by more than a century in respect of their principal periods of research, nevertheless appear remarkably compatible: in their respective conclusions that American society contained economic divisions of "unmistakable magnitude". The relationship of these exactly the disjunction, of the concept of American equality and the persistence of American society, is demonstrated to have been created long before Independence and was not the result of the Revolution. It is not therefore necessary to conclude that the expansion of America merely paralleled the development of Europe, or that the development of Europe was the cause of change, or that the causes of change be subjected to further scrutiny.

Princetonians 1769-1774: A Biographical Dictionary, by Richard A. Harrison (385pp. Princeton University Press. £23.55; 0 691 04675 1) is the second volume in a series of biographical sketches of students who attended the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University). The volume takes the story of the College from its founding to the beginning of the American Revolution. It is not only the contributions of the sons of Nassau Hall to the formation of the Republic but also the role of the College itself as a major component in the evolution of the first national state. Only two of the 178 students of Nassau Hall during these years were prominent in the ranks of American Independence.

The calculus of conflict

By John Keegan

DAVID WILKINSON:

Deadly Quarrels
Lewis F. Richardson and the Statistical Study of War
256pp. University of California Press. 0 520 03829 0

Lewis Fry Richardson was an unusual figure, yet recognizably of his times. A Quaker, he decanted as a conscientious objector during the First World War but served in an ambulance unit. After the war he devoted his life to pacifist objectives though in a thoroughly practical way. He was a scientist by training and had no time for what he called rhetoric. Instead, he set about codifying the frequency, magnitude, duration, complexity and, as far as was possible, causal factors of wars since 1820, in the hope of being able to prevent outbreaks by an understanding of symptoms. It was a lonely task. "There are many anti-war societies," he observed at the end of his life, "but they are concerned with propaganda, not research" (today he would have to make exception for the Stockholm Institute). But he was not discouraged, even by the amorphousness of his data and the elusiveness of firm conclusions. Those he arrived at, together with his workings, were published as *Arms and Insecurity* and *Statistics of Deadly Quarrels*. The latter is the better known and its exegesis is the subject of David Wilkinson's book.

Professor Wilkinson, though now a political scientist, had a mathematical training like Richardson's and, as a behaviourist, was attracted to Richardson's work because it provided the largest body of statistical material related to a fundamental political question: Why do wars happen? Temperamentally he holds to the view that the truths of politics are not self-evident; that social causes and effects are not plain as day, but complex and obscure, to be known not by direct intuition but by systematic, methodical and laborious research, applying the methods of the more successful

natural sciences." But he had doubts both about the rigour of Richardson's methods and the completeness of his data. He therefore set himself to go back over the material, further codify it and, then, fellow researchers, to consider proceeding from the consolidated base to a renewed exploration of Richardson's great question.

Richardson's approach was thus: he counted the wars which coded between 1820 and 1952 (his total was 315), estimated the number of pairs of opposed belligerents (780), assigned a duration to each war and a magnitude, which was a logarithm of the number of dead, and finally coded each contest by reference to fifty-nine variables. Eighteen of these, written as lower case Roman letters, were held to make for clarity; twenty-five, written as Roman capitals, to make for clarity; sixteen, written as Greek lower-case letters, were held to be ambivalent. A system of arrows and accents denoted relationships between the variables. As an example of how his coding worked in practice, Wilkinson chooses the China War of 1856-60. Here "CDFHIO" reveals that the British and Chinese traded, were of markedly different physical types, customarily dressed differently, had markedly different marriage customs, felt their religions or philosophies of life to be in contrast, spoke different languages and had conflicting legal systems.

In a second set of codes, the sequence "M 14 A arrow H arrow K" two arrows X two arrows" (the direction of the arrow had a special significance) denotes that a previous Anglo-Chinese war had ended four years earlier, that the Chinese interfered with British trade and restricted British immigration and that the two races were exceptionally ignorant of each other and marked by unusually strong racial pride.

Richardson then began to count, tallied his letters, and, finally, applied statistical technique to their frequency. His professional work was in meteorology, for which he was elected to the Royal Society, and he had, therefore, a close familiarity with the technique of forecasting. This was useful, because he was ultimately looking for dissonances. After clustering

factors which made for war, and others associated with the peaceful resolution of conflict, he looked above all for similar sets which had different outcomes, feeling that those would best repay deeper analysis. Hope inspired his vision. If he could find circumstances which in some cases precipitated war but in others did not, he was encouraged to believe that humanity could be taught in all such cases to work its way through to a settlement. And thence to tackle the circumstances which always seemed to lead to war.

He never really got there, though he did propose some interesting observations about the declining frequency and duration of wars in his period, the "pacifying effect of common government" (civil wars are less common than international wars, and least likely in long-established states), the tendency of alliances and outbreaks to association, the rarity of multi-combatant wars and the difficulty of assigning any mathematical value to economic causes. There were some odd statistical sports, like the association of Christianity and the Spanish language with bellicosity, "Roman Catholicism and wolfing" by the mathematician in Nigel Balchin's *Small Back Room*. There was also a suggestion of periodicity, with a twenty-four year cycle overlying a one hundred-two hundred year cycle, which - with apologies to the author - does ring an intuitive bell with historians.

But in general a historian's reaction to Richardson's work is a doubting one. The firm conclusions look too obvious: for example, the observation of an association between alliances and outbreaks is, of course, completely circular. The tentative conclusions require more work. And it is there, as Wilkinson himself points out, that the foundations of Richardson's mathematics start to go soggy. For Richardson assembled his data largely from the Fourteenth Edition of the *Britannica*, *Keating's* and the *Cambridge Modern History*. None is to be derided, naturally. But, as Richardson surely ought to have been aware, the compression of material necessary to such publications requires in itself a system of coding which will not be standard and which a secondary codifier has no means of

evaluating. We may, therefore, suspect that Richardson's historical conclusions have roughly the same validity as would his meteorological forecasts, had those been based on readings made with a selection of unsynchronized chronometers.

Yet none of this is to say that Richardson's purpose was not wholly admirable, or that his eclectic approach is not worthwhile. His trouble may have been that he chose to count the wrong things, and over too short a period. Religion, language, physical appearance are facts of life, and most of them ineradicable. They would appear in a statistical count of almost any recurrent human activity, and bear whatever significance the codifier chooses to give them. More profitable would have been a count of events specific to warfare - battles, sieges, blockades - and recourse to map-plotting. Very striking patterns would have then jumped off the paper. There have, for example, been seven battles of Adrianople (Edirne), a small town on a river confluence 130 miles west of Istanbul, spread over the period 323-1911. There have been four battles of Acre, three of Ansbach, seven of Constantinople, nine of Jerusalem. And these, of course, are only titular ascriptions. If events are plotted rather than place-names, it quickly becomes obvious that most military activity takes place in quite extraordinary circumscribed localities: a narrow strip of Mediterranean littoral between Beirut and Alexandria, the shores of the Bosphorus, the plain of the Po, the estuaries of the Scheldt and Meuse, the course of the Vistula, the Crimea and environs, the Tigris valley, southern Manchuria and perhaps a dozen other quite small regions. Almost all stand at

political or cultural junctions, or in corridors between cultures and politics, so that the observation threatens to chase its tail if it is left there.

It becomes more promising if associated with the buffer-state idea and the demilitarized zone principle. Neither has a consistent record of success. But the nuclear revolution puts an unprecedented high premium on the avoidance of local outbreaks which threaten to draw in the great powers. And, where neutralized or effectively demilitarized zones exist, as in Korea or along the Swiss-Austrian-Yugoslav belt, there is a noticeable absence of day-by-day alarms and excursions, if lack of newspaper interest is taken as a measure.

Two other large trends would repay study by the peacemakers, both of periodicity. Richardson detected a twenty-four year cycle in war-fighting. He seems not to have tested it against any of the theories of trade cycle - perhaps, given the readiness of economists to disagree about almost everything, understandably, but nevertheless it was worth a try. Nor does he seem to have taken the generational cycle into account. Blainey's *Causes of War*, in other respects a disappointing book, did make the inherently convincing suggestion that nothing makes for a long peace so much as a thoroughly painful experience of what the glories of the battlefield means in practice. The idea is Hobbesian, and therefore unfashionable. But if the liberal belief in the power of education to civilize has any life left in it, it could be deployed in no better direction than in transmitting what are now grandparents' memories of the Second World War to their grandchildren.

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The professionals and the predatory pikes

By Michael Gilbert

ERIC AMBLER:
The Care of Time
250pp. Weidenfeld. £6.50.
0 297 77695 9

In his History of Crime Writing, *Bloody Murder*, Julian Symons refers to Eric Ambler in terms which emphasize his significance in the development of one special branch of crime fiction, the spy story. He uses expressions such as "The values put forward by the spy story up to the advent of Eric Ambler" and "for all spy writers before Ambler". In other words he regards Eric Ambler as an innovator, and rightly so. The difficulty, as each well-planned, well-written novel appears, is to identify exactly where the innovations are taking him.

In the stories which Ambler wrote before *The War* (difficult to realize, as we use those words, that we are speaking of a time nearly fifty years ago) the position is easy to appreciate. Symons sums it up aptly: "The central character is an innocent figure mixed up in violent events, who slowly comes to realize that the agents and spies working on both sides are for the most part unpleasant and not important men." In truth Ambler is "turning Sapper and Buchan upside down". He has produced the first anti-hero. Up to that point the man in charge knew that what he was doing was worthwhile ("It is no exaggeration to say, Carruthers, that the fate of the Western world may depend on your pulling this off") and the readers knew that Carruthers would pull it off, and would save the Western world. With Ambler these certainties vanished. The hero is no longer a superhero. He is the man in the train to London Bridge who travels up with other commuters to a respectable job; but happens for once, to have been sent abroad by his firm, out of comfortable England to parts of Europe where passports and visas take the place of season tickets and the police do not spend the whole of their time helping old ladies across the road. He gets back to England in the end; but one feels sure that he promises himself, as he sinks into the armchair in his house at Severnside and his wife brings him his first pre-dinner gin, that he will never willingly cross the channel again.

This view of people and their reactions to dramatic events did not survive into a post-war world. Symons is

dismissive of the later Ambler novels as "plain thrillers", and certainly the two or three books which followed the end of the War are thrillers. *Passage of Arms* and *The Night-Corner* are set in the Far East of a crumbling Dutch East Indies and a renaissance Malaya. They are full of the sort of shrewd comments that a man makes when he is able to take a longer and more analytical view of life. "You can be deceived about loving," says the hero, "but not so easily about liking". And his view of the political situation might have been put by Ernest Bramah into the mouth of Kai Lung:

With a determined trouble-maker, a knife in the back would be the only safe solution. With a more self-interested man, however, a well-paid civil appointment might be the best answer. If, besides purchasing his loyalty, you could also expect to gain his service as an informer, an even more lucrative post could be awarded.

Thrillers, then, if you like, but "plain" thrillers only in the most complimentary sense of the word. I have a feeling that in this next series of books, down to and including *The Light of Day*, Ambler was working himself out of this stilt as a writer of film scripts and back to his first love. One can picture him, at about the time when he wrote *The Leveller*, a book which seems to mark a second change of gear, looking around the world almost in despair at the difficulty of fitting it into the framework of the crime novel. It was a world in which machines had outstripped men; a world in which an eavesdropper no longer crouched at the keyhole but a world in which the telephone lens was more important than the human eye and the computer had started to take over from the human brain. One difficulty was that, as soon as the novelty had worn off, it was easier to be dull about these sophisticated devices than it was about their human predecessors. A chapter or two of the modern CIA school demonstrates this truth almost to the point of nausea.

Bloody Murder appeared in 1972, which is almost the exact moment that Ambler's work moved forward into the new, and possibly not even yet, final, new. Just as painters are described as having blue periods and green periods, so might this be described as Ambler's Swiss period. Not because his books are

centre around Switzerland, where he now lives, although some do, but because all of them demonstrate a conclusion that the world is a single body. The brain may still be influenced by the heady forces of nationalism or the drive of private ambition, but the muscles and the nerves which guide the limbs are financial, and the liquid which flows down the arteries and veins is dark red gold.

In Eric Ambler's latest book, *The Care of Time*, a further element is added, an extra ganglion in the body politic: the universality of terror.

What we have to face now, as the second great terrorist wave starts to break, is a threat to our civilization of a wholly different kind, and on a wholly different scale from anything we have experienced before.

Organized terrorism is represented by Mukhabarat Zentrum, organized finance by Syncom-Sentinel, while between them moves that typical Ambler figure, the middleman, the fixer. He is called Bocket or Hecht, or more usually Zander, all synonyms for the predatory pike. He is a high level go-between, a slush fund manager with a multi-million dollar business run out of three brief cases and permanent luxury hotel suites in all major capitals.

For a work in this field, the plot is comparatively simple. Zander is trying to arrange a military base for the Americans in the territory in the Gulf of "the Ruler" - tactfully never identified - in exchange for the sort of

immunity for himself and his family which is normally offered to defectors. A new name, a new identity, a new passport. The Ruler, a manic depressive paranoid, will only meet the NATO representatives in a health clinic-cum-fall-out shelter in Southern Austria. The meeting is certain to be complicated by the presence of Mukhabarat Zentrum, led by the unpleasant French Algerian, Raoul Bourger, who had killed four officers of Gendarmarie before he reached his sixteenth birthday.

The story is told in the first person by Robert Halliday, an American ghost-writer. He is brought in by Zander to provide, as a cover story for the meeting, a television interview with the Ruler. It is a tribute to Ambler's expertise that he makes all this sound horribly plausible. The characters, Zander and the Ruler in particular, are a great deal more than prototypes. The book is full of those felicities which mark all Ambler's work: "The leaden sarcasms which are the characteristic first stages of a French loss of temper"; or "Among the tycoons I have known the unprinting of disputes between rival subordinates has always been regarded as good healthy fun"; or, better still, "On a day of battle it is best to talk only nonsense".

Graham Greene has called Ambler "our greatest thriller writer". It is an assessment that few would challenge. All one asks when reading his latest book is, where does it stand in the great

roll of thrillers he has been producing for the last fifty years? Does it stand at the top, with *The Mask of Dimitrios*, *The Night-Corner* and *The Leveller* in my view, not quite.

It has a superb opening sentence: "The warning message arrived on Monday, the bomb itself on Wednesday; it became a busy week." And the first meeting between Halliday and Zander, in Northern Italy. The book, too, is an explosion of violence at the end of a long and carefully laid line. The reader with a good memory will taken right back to *Journey Into Fear*.

It is the centre portion which is a trouble. To put the matter in a nutshell, it takes a little too long to get from Northern Italy to Southern Austria. The descriptions of the different hotels, some with too much service, some with none at all, the episodes by the way, the dissonant racket run by the Austrian traffic police, would all be interesting and diverting in a book of travel. In a thriller they are diverting a different sense. They divert the reader from the main line of the plot. The unities of time, place and action are as important in a thriller as they were in classical drama.

There is one other particular in which this book differs from almost all that have gone before. It is a simple-minded amateur. He is a hardened, experienced and resourceful professional. It makes a big change.

Deadly details

By Francis Wyndham

RUTH RENDELL:
Put on By Cunniff
208pp. Hutchinson. £5.95.
0 09 14420 X

With twenty-two books written over eighteen years, Ruth Rendell has established a double eminence in two separate categories of crime fiction: the classic puzzle, with a stable background and a recurring cast headed by a mildly eccentric detective and his more conventional subordinate; and the novel of pure suspense, in which a blundering innocent and a haunted psychopath become fatally entangled in a paranoid conspiracy of cross purposes and sinister coincidences. In both fields success is difficult, but for opposite reasons: the first has been so thoroughly mined, by a brilliant team stretching from Agatha Christie to P. D. James, that its resources are in danger of being exhausted; and the second, pioneered by the lone figure of Patricia Highsmith, is all the more daunting because comparatively unexplored. Combining a masterly grasp of plot construction with a highly developed faculty for social observation, Ruth Rendell's remarkable talent has been able to accommodate the rigid rules of the reassuring mystery story (where a superficial logic conceals a basic fantasy) as well as the wider range of the disturbing psychological thriller (where an appearance of nightmare overlays a scrupulous realism).

Before considering her latest book, which belongs to the first category, I would like to remind readers of some of her achievements in the second. *The Pique of Treason* (1974): a penniless young man in a filthy cottage near Fosseford Forest is seduced by an "enigmatic beauty, a visit abroad to his dying mother and French waiter, a plane at the thought of a girl, a girl in a room, a pervasive atmosphere of impending disaster but the form of the disaster is not clear until it will come. At Fosseford Forest (1976): Kenbourne Vale, London. Ailsa - Ruth Rendell's latest

microcosm of metropolitan menace conveyed with unnerving accuracy; the perversity who periodically strangles a tailor's dummy in the cellar until this safety valve is appropriated for a Guy Fawkes bonfire; the lover whose mail is intercepted by the perversity, at first by accident and then by design. (This tampering with vital correspondence, like the image of the locked-in dog, is almost - but of course not quite - too painful to read about). *A Judgment in Stone* (1977): Ruth Rendell's most daring balancing-act, in which she gives away the whole plot in the opening sentence and throughout the narrative keeps on reminding her readers of its outcome while somehow or other increasing the tension by this means. *Make Death Love Me* (1979): the hen-pecked bank manager, the clumsy kidnapping, the unexpected idyll, irony piled on irony in a circular pattern like a snake stinging its own tail. *The Lake of Darkness* (1980): instead of imaginary Wils, a vivid evocation of the vicinity of Parliament Hill Fields and Gospel Oak; a philanthropic impulse is undermined by a hidden ambivalence; an intricate labyrinthine complexity in which every element is doubly duplicated by its opposite.

Put on By Cunniff continues the chronicles of Kingsnackham, that murder-prone Sussex village protected by Chief Inspector Westford and Inspector Burden, as neatly paired a couple in their way as the two Ronnies. When first met in 1964 (*From Doon With Death*) Westford was fifty-two years old, "thickset without being fat"; six years later (*A Gully Thing Surprised*) he "looked more mountainous than ever"; by 1977 (*Murder Being Once Done*) a thrombosis had been diagnosed; and in 1979 (*Means Of Evil*) he is described as "a tall, ungainly, rather ugly man who had once been fat to the point of obesity but had slimmed to gauntness for reasons of health". He has a rather striking addiction to literary quotations (often reflected in his croakings; oddly unmemorable ones) which he exchanges competitively with his nephew, Detective Superintendent Howard Fortune of the Kenbourne Vale CID, but which tend to go over Burden's head. He is happily married to his understanding Berta, although in 1975 (*Island*

Hands For Ever) he only resisted infidelity with the Irish sensual Nancy Lake. His eldest daughter Sylvia is married with no sons; in 1978 (*A Sleeping Life*) she belatedly loses her husband as a result of a car accident, but soon returns. The younger daughter, his favourite, Sheila Westford of the Royal Spears Company, who has played Jessica at the National, and starred in a revival of Molière's *The Miser*, and is now a household name after appearing for five years as Stewardess Curlew, the most beautiful of the air hostesses in the *Southwest* TV serial *Runaway*.

Twenty years younger than his chief, Burden is prim, handsome, a natty dresser. After his second wife Jean died in 1971 (*No More Days Than*) and he was left with a young John and Pat alone, everyone thought he would marry Jean's sister Grace; instead he had a platonic affair with an Englishwoman named Gemma Lawrence. The experience left him "a little less experienced" and since he had a second marriage, to Jenny Trevelyan, whose brother Amys works for the publishing firm of Carlton Brent & Co. is slightly less of a philistine. There are even signs in *Put on By Cunniff* that the may-one day be a match "some of Westford's most accessible literary references. One development of a domestic novel revealed in the new novel is that the wedding of a rich young businesswoman named Andrew Thorpe to an old-fashioned, somewhat dowdy, and a former admirer, Rex Newell, will be a disaster.

Why does one dwell so obsessively on these trivial, insignificant details about the goings-on in the village of Kingsnackham? Partly because to reveal only the surface of the central plot is to neglect the fun of potential readers. Inadvertently deluding a detective by inadvertently deluding a detective (in thrillers all material is a feast and any comment, cast by a feast and partly because obsessive dwelling on trivial marginalia is a habit of the book itself, there is a little more to the book than the plot. The plot is a simple one: a man who has been fat to the point of obesity but has slimmed to gauntness for reasons of health. He is happily married to his understanding Berta, although in 1975 (*Island*

JOHN DICKSON CARR:
The Door to Doom
352pp. Hamish Hamilton. £8.95.
0 241 10533 8

The detective novels and stories of John Dickson Carr (1906-77) have received the highest praise without ever becoming either a popular success or a highbrow fad. He is the acknowledged master of that classic genre, the tale of detection in which detection is seen to take place, the clues really are shared with the reader, and crimes of majestic and melodramatic impossibility are shown as last to have been possible after all, if not always very plausible. His villains sometimes get, and (less excusably) are revealed as having banked on, more than their fair share of luck, but he never assists them by coincidence, obscurity or any kind of cheating.

So much is evidently not enough for some. There are those like Julian Symons who give Carr full credit for inventiveness and professional skill but find him an excessive reliance on formula and a lack of human warmth amounting to an absence of characterization. Not a few would go further and charge him with disastrous facetiousness on occasion, instancing *The Blind Barber* as a fair idea as exemplarily ruined by this notion that drink, anything to do with drink, is funny. Again, at every emotional turn he is likely to plunge into the style of the novelette.

Carr's admirers would not argue with these objections, which for them do not diminish the brilliance of the puzzles or the mouldering menace behind them. What some see as adherence to a prescription appears to others as the following of a ritual or a recurring dream: the approach of a crime, the murder by way of bolted doors and barred shutters, a room of smooth sand or a room of snow, most typically through a well-lighted place watched by several alert and faithful witnesses who saw nothing. And of course there are no secret passages, hidden trapdoors or concealed compartments, any more than there are twin brothers or identical twins. Spenser or Lister the reader knows, "But nobody could have done it".

Impossible crimes were the stock-in-trade of Chesterton in the Father Brown stories. Bodies vanished and living men were snatched up into the air to "all appearances" by magic. Only Father Brown saw the truth, the overlooked possibility - but so often it could not have been seen, or would not have been overlooked, or was not a possibility. In that marvelous and much-echoed story "The Invisible Man", for instance, one of the four "sentinels" would have been sure to mention the mysterious intruder. It was Carr's great stroke to make good such perceptible gaps, to devise the contrivance that created an apparently perfect illusion of miracle and still held one tiny, out-of-sight weak spot which enabled the detective finally to demolish the whole elaborate contrivance. That detective was as likely as not to be the scholarly Dr. Gideon Fell, a jovial caricature of GK Chesterton, unworriedly, shrewd and devoted to beer.

If Carr owes something to Chesterton, he owes about as much to the kind of stories that began to be written in the 1920s by Agatha Christie and others: those set in the villages and country towns and grand houses of southern England. Coming from the USA to live here in 1933, he made his own characteristic contribution to this sub-genre, laying out his neo-Gothic edifices among the manorhouses and tennis-courts. He soon developed a feeling for the "haunted" of local life - sometimes a "haunted" of the past, sometimes a "haunted" of the future, and his ear for the English turn of phrase, though his English is not perfect, is unsurpassed by any other foreign-born writer known to me. In their minor way these

novels supply some sympathetic insight into the social history of that vanished era.

Carr had already settled on his speciality - the locked-room problem - but not much else; his earlier novels (1930-2) are melodramatic in style, have harrowing bits in them and feature a tiresomely flamboyant French detective, Henri Benoit. As soon as Carr had produced *Dr. Fell* (*Hag's Nook*, 1933) he was in full control. He wrote so fast thereafter that in the following year, presumably to evade charges of over-production, he began publishing under a pseudonym, Carter Dickson, as well as his own name. The Dickson novels naturally display a different, the eccentric Sir Henry Merrivale, Bt, who seems to many readers as tiresome as Benoit in his way, and also out of drawing. H.M. is a member of the English aristocracy, whom even English people find it hard to understand, and keeps saying things like "Burn me!" and "Lor love a duck!" and referring to the Lord Chief Justice as "Boko".

In the dozen years of his heyday Carr/Dickson turned out over thirty novels and some twenty shorter tales of an ingenuously altogether his own. One thinks of *How Deadly a Kill* (Dickson), in which a perfectly ordinary man is sent on the inside from the outside. *The Judas Window* (Dickson), with its calm announcement that there is such a homicide-facilitating aperture in most rooms (though my experiments indicate that the window, easy enough to open with a screwdriver and a knitting needle, can only be closed after entering by the door); *The Black Spectacles* (Carr), the most accomplished fusing of the far-fetched and the domestic; unless *The Crooked Hinge* (Carr) is that in a different way. There, for once the master's mind can be glimpsed at the moment of inspiration, the foundation-stone of the whole intricate structure identified in the quotation from the opening of the first Father Brown story, "The Blue Cross", that Carr uses as the epigraph to his final section:

"There was one thing which Flammbeau, with all his dexterity of disguise, could not cover, and that was his singular height. . . . Carr's murderer can lose six inches in a few minutes, and his method is quite simple, indeed obvious once you have thought of it, only you never would have thought of it - the mark of all the author's best inventions. (The trick of height-variation, by the way, is not performable by more than a small minority of persons; and requires certain apparatus, though this would be on open sale. It is not any form of stilt.)

The Burning Court (Carr, 1937) is many people's favourite and also extraordinary. Yes, but the detective, a non-recurring character, is commonplace; true, the structure demands that he should be commonplace, but I still miss Dr. Fell. That apart, the enterprise is of irreproachable quality. As a series of crimes

HELEN HOKE:
Sinsister, Strange and Supernatural
160pp. J. M. Dent. £3.95.
0 460 06072 4

Helen Hoke's anthology of ten stories, *Sinsister, Strange and Supernatural*, is a large, readable and undisturbing collection, with the exception of Jack Finney's "Contents of the Dead Man's Pocket", not a ghost story at all but a gripping account of an experience so vivid in its anticipation of imminent death that life can never seem quite the same again. Unforgettable, though not to be read by sufferers from vertigo. Elsewhere there is a cheerful ham actor's ghost from Jean Stubbs ("These are the days of the very devil for a middle-aged ghost on a dark night"), Cynthia Asquith's highly traditional ghost buried in a sunken garden along

The art of the impossible

By Kingsley Amis

There can be few kinds of writing that look colder in print (apart from the text of a rock musical, possibly) than a radio play. A writer like Carr, heavily concerned with situation, setting, physical and other detail, clues and so on is at an added disadvantage, and his characters here do tend to lead off by standing toe to toe gabbling instant information at each other. Nevertheless, these half-dozen scripts from 1942-3 are full of cunning bits and what read very much like passages conceived for radio rather than translated from the page.

The best is a brilliant variation on the familiar Paris Exposition story, about the old girl who develops a bubonic plague there and is spirited away so thoroughly that, when her daughter returns to their hotel, there is no trace of her. An account of this is hailed into Carr's first scene, but with thirty minutes for everything, what would you?

This volume also contains a couple of unsuccessful but readable attempts to combine deductive and macabre elements, an entertaining account of English highwaymen from Isaac Atkinson to Dick Turpin, an essay

on detective stories that has dated a little over these last thirty-five years, and a splendid remark about Raymond Chandler to the effect that he might have been some good if he had ever bothered with "the fatigue of construction and clues" - middle-aged trends, take note. There is a useful but too-short biography and a bibliography. All in all, as perhaps has already been guessed, general readers will not much concern themselves with the present offering.

What readers will? Those interested in the author and his works, those interested in detective stories and those interested in popular literature in its golden age, 1890-1950; but chiefly, of course, the first-mentioned group. The detective story at its best consists of the Sherlock Holmes stories, especially the first three volumes, the Father Brown stories, especially the first two volumes, half a dozen or more novels by Carr/Dickson (*The Hollow Man*, *The Ten Tenebris* and *The Reader is Warned* besides those already mentioned), and some individual volumes and scattered scenes by other hands.

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ELLIS PETERS

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A part-time lunatic

By Julian Barnes

THOMAS MAEDER:
The Unspeakable Crimes of Dr Petiot
302pp. Hutchinson. £7.95.
0 316 54366 7

Was bring opportunity and horrible profit to mass murderers, whether nationalized or private enterprise. Paris under the Occupation provided ideal conditions. There was the everyday confusion of wartime, the moral confusion of who exactly was the enemy, and the investigative confusion of rival policing bodies with only a spasmodic interest in cooperation. Thousands of people were already disappearing through official channels (150,000 native and foreign Jews were deported from France in the course of the war); many more – plus a murky froth of minor gangsters and pimps – were keen to buy their way out of the country first, using whatever unofficial routes were available.

On this sad litter crew of flailing escapers Dr Maurice Petiot preyed for two years. Like a shipwrecker with a deceptive lantern, Petiot waved the flickering promise of refuge abroad. He let it be understood that he was the coordinator of a Resistance escape route, and from that point victims delivered themselves into his hands self-trussed. They paid him a substantial fee; they removed all identifying marks from their clothes; they gathered up their most precious belongings, especially jewellery, into one small suitcase; they wrote presumptive letters announcing their safe arrival in Argentina or wherever; and finally, it seems, they trustingly rolled up their own sleeves to receive from Dr Petiot the injection which he assured them was necessary in order to enter the country he was sending them to.

In fact, their final destination was no farther than Petiot's house in the rue Le Sueur, where, in March 1944, police discovered fifteen kilos of charred bones, eleven kilos of uncharred bones, three tons of clothing (this, though the victims had been instructed to travel light), a D1V limousine, and a mysterious triangular room – with a sphole (papered over), no inside door handle, and eight iron rings sunk into the wall for some unknown but nefarious purpose. This final Edgar Allan

Poe touch excited both press and public, but the room's function remained finally unguessed: Petiot went to the guillotine without ever revealing how he killed his victims. He was charged with murdering twenty-seven, convicted of twenty-six, boasted himself of sixty-three, and may well have been responsible for a few more. There had been, for instance, a rash of diaphragmed corpses, butchered in exactly the same chicken-carving fashion, bobbing their way down the Seine in the months immediately before Petiot perfected his domestic disposal system.

"Mass murderers are different from us", one imagines the mere one-off slaughterer complain. "Yes, they kill more people!" comes the reply, Hemingway to Fitzgerald. Sometimes this is true. The simple dogged psychopath – like Graham Young or Peter Sutcliffe – is often deeply dull; his killings seem almost an existential necessity, something to define his life, to make him special, and their continuance is necessary to prolong that precariously established identity. Petiot was quite different, and this difference makes Thomas Maeder's lively and readable study of the case all the more gripping. There seems, inevitably, to have been the normal, ungraspable vacuum at the heart of Petiot's character – the part outsiders can never enter, never understand without being the psychopath himself – and whose attempted definition by professional producers semi-comic circularity (thus Dr Gourion, one of the three psychiatrists at the trial, announced of Petiot that "insufficient moral education has permitted him to acquire a taste for evil" – a very French remark, doubtless intended to trigger off remorse in some Auxerrois teacher of Philo). But around this vacuum there swirls a visible character of intelligence, charm, humour, enality and viciousness. Maeder quotes "an early psychiatric description of the psychopathic personality" (author strangely uncited) which lists four childhood symptoms characteristic of this condition: somnambulism, enuresis, cruelty to animals ("particularly beheading"), and arson. Petiot scored three out of four, lacking only arson for a full house. But even such occasional precisions leave us only temporarily enlightened, for Petiot's sole, predictable manner of behaviour was the unpredictable. He constantly darts off into the bizarre and the arbitrary, one day buying three hundred gabardine raincoats at auction,

the next suddenly behaving like a concerned and efficient doctor.

Before turning to mass murder, Petiot enjoyed a colourful career and a yoying sanity – Maeder nicely calls him "a part-time lunatic" for the way he turned his fluctuating condition to his own advantage. The only constant factor, result of that early lack of Pascal and Descartes, was an adeptness at any form of crime (there must, surely, be a few unsolved cases of arson in the region of Auxerre which could retrospectively be stuck on him). As a five-year-old he enjoyed dipping kittens' paws in boiling water; as an adolescent he devised a stick with glue on the end for stealing letters from postboxes; as a doctor in Villeneuve-sur-Yonne he deployed kleptomania, burglary, and a possible trunk-murder; as a socialist mayor of the town he rose to pension fraud, more larceny, another two possible murders, plus theft of electricity. He sidled in drug-dealing and the procurement of abortions. Publicly, however, he remained extremely popular, able to blame any accusations thrown at him on political muck-raking. When this failed, he could always fall back on part-time lunacy as a defence.

In 1933 Petiot moved to Paris, setting up as a doctor in the Saint-Sauveur district with the help of one of his wittier friends. His advertising handbill boasted along with claims that he could "remove or relieve" everything from fungi, red spots, curiarity (thus Dr Gourion, one of the three psychiatrists at the trial, announced of Petiot that "insufficient moral education has permitted him to acquire a taste for evil" – a very French remark, doubtless intended to trigger off remorse in some Auxerrois teacher of Philo). But around this vacuum there swirls a visible character of intelligence, charm, humour, enality and viciousness. Maeder quotes "an early psychiatric description of the psychopathic personality" (author strangely uncited) which lists four childhood symptoms characteristic of this condition: somnambulism, enuresis, cruelty to animals ("particularly beheading"), and arson. Petiot scored three out of four, lacking only arson for a full house. But even such occasional precisions leave us only temporarily enlightened, for Petiot's sole, predictable manner of behaviour was the unpredictable. He constantly darts off into the bizarre and the arbitrary, one day buying three hundred gabardine raincoats at auction,

With little more than the odd murder here and there, Petiot built up a successful practice. He also invented an aphrodisiac suppository, an infallible cure for constipation, and cracked the secret of perpetual motion (later, during the war, he designed a weapon which was "short-range, silent, and all wounds it inflicted were lethal": it was, of course, so secret that it couldn't be shown to anyone). The Occupation brought fresh challenges for the psychopathic criminal, and some of the rest he knew. The doctor from Auxerre who had been incarcerated in the same asylum as Artaud, and who had been pursued by Georges Massus (the model for Malgrat), was prosecuted with



Petiot and Floriot doze during the trial. This photograph is taken from a book reviewed here.

lethargic incompetence and defended, by Maître Floriot, with much brilliance. The trial became a society event, and at one point the court adjourned to the rue Le Sueur, where lawyers posed smilingly with thighbones in their hands. Petiot himself put on a brilliant display: he was witty, mocking, and destructively scornful. One witness who declined to take Petiot's escape route was explaining his doubts:

CADORET: . . . He told us we would have to spend three days hidden in a house near the Etoile before leaving. . . . There was something very suspicious about the whole arrangement. Petiot told us we would need vaccinations to get into Argentina. He said, "These injections will render you invisible to the eyes of the world."

Petiot: I see it all now. The mad doctor with the syringe. It was a dark and rainy night. The wind howled under the eaves and rattled the windowpanes of the oak-panelled library –

LESER (President of the trial): Petiot, please.

When he was in the death cell, Petiot wrote poetry and a 300-page manuscript about winning methods of juggling, called *Le Hazard vaincu* – it which seems to answer Malgrat. Petiot's number finally came up to spite a delay when the public defender went on strike for his wages on March 25, 1946. As he waited for the guillotine, he resorted to Floriot: "Malgré moi, j'aurais voulu publier quelque chose de moi-même, mais j'ai été empêché par la guillotine." He said, "Malgré moi, j'aurais voulu publier quelque chose de moi-même, mais j'ai été empêché par la guillotine."

Nothing significant links the lives of these five writers, although Jessica Mann makes much of the shared interest in theatre, play-writing, and the fact that they had their own plays performed at school. (This, surely, could be applied to many novelists, not only those concerned with crime?)

It is not of course, Miss Mann's fault that the lives under scrutiny offer so little to arouse interest or stimulate the imagination, but she is responsible for the repetition which seeps from Part 1 into Part 2, and for the irritating habit of referring to herself as "this author" who, agreeing or disagreeing with a source, she takes Julian Symonds to task more than once.

Earlier this year Gollancz published *The Lady Investigators*, a lively survey of the female detective in fiction by Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig. Jessica Mann has provided a companion volume – although from different houses they are of a size and sit well together on a shelf – and an answer to

her own question: "Why are respectable English women so good at murder?" It is, she believes, because they have an eye for minute detail, necessary in detection, and also because the murders in detective stories are disturbing, often taking the minimal to go free, often taking the maximal to go free. (Christie, Agatha, and Sayers set their jig-saw puzzle in the peaceful English countryside, where a calm, God-ordained order remains untroubled by the restless stirring of workers' demands. Death occurred but violence was ennobled. A dark stain spreading on the Axminster or a neat butter bowl in the back of a dinner jacket or a temple symbolized the act of murder. As Jessica Mann puts it:

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Passions of the intellect

By Victoria Glendinning

JAMES BRABAZON:
Dorothy L. Sayers
The Life of a Courageous Woman
308pp. Gollancz. £9.95.
0 515 02728 2

The mystery of Dorothy L. Sayers is solved, in so far as human mysteries ever are solved. The facts of her literary life are relatively well-documented; it is chiefly for the strange story of her personal life that James Brabazon's biography will be read. It was authored by Anthony Fleming, Dorothy Sayers's son, who gave Brabazon "unrestricted access to her papers". The only reason he did so was that other books were being written without such access and "with varying degrees of accuracy".

Presumably the principal sprat which caught this mackerel was Janet Hickman's *Such A Strange Lady* (1975); she had discovered that Dorothy's "adopted" son Anthony, whose very existence was unknown to most other friends, was in fact her true son. The child had been born in 1924, when Dorothy was unmarried, and she had kept the secret even from her parents. After they died, the habit of secrecy kept her silent; and even after she herself died in 1957, the secret was kept until it occurred to Janet Hickman to look up Anthony's birth certificate in Somerset House. He himself, who had discovered his parentage by such the same means soon after the war, and who seems to have had a good deal of distant relationship with his mother, writes a dignified and generous preface to this book.

Dorothy Sayers had an uncomfortable and contradictory personality and this is in some ways an uncomfortable and contradictory book, which adds considerably to its interest. James Brabazon's narrative style is fluent and smooth, blistered only by the odd colloquialism – "trendy", "down-market" – and the occasional blunt or inadequate identification. "Professor Fred Hoyle, a popular scientist of the period . . . He has made good use of two unpublished autobiographical fragments to document Dorothy Sayers's childhood. Her father was chaplain and headmaster of the choir of Christ Church, Oxford, when Dorothy was born in 1893. His family was Irish, from Co Tipperary; her mother's family, the Leights, were 'paleologically more impressive', and the confident family voice can be deduced from the information that

Dorothy pronounced Sayers to rhyme with "stairs". Her mother's family name was preserved in the never-omitted "L" of Dorothy L. Sayers.

The family left Oxford for Bluntham in fenland Huntingdonshire, where Dorothy, an only child, grew up "cut off from those of her own age by the barriers of class, and from those of her own class by the barriers of age". She was, by her own account, indulged, precocious, griggish, bookish, secretive as a cat and very clever. Her excitements were intellectual; then and ever after, religion, which was central to her life, was "an aspect of the intellect not one of personal devotion".

The first important friend was her cousin Ivy Shrimpton, five years older. With her Dorothy played out a fantasy in which she herself was the musketeer Athos: "panache", says Mr Brabazon, is a key word for describing Dorothy. Athos was sent to the Godolphin School where she was unhappy and ill and her hair fell out. It grew back, but feebly. As a young woman, she sometimes wore a flamboyant elver wig; but "throughout her life, Dorothy's hair was to make her miserable".

She was happier at Somerville College, Oxford, where she read French and was a founder member of a group that called itself the Mutual Admiration Society; here her Athos characteristics had more scope. She had "a sort of hearty gusto, with a streak of coarseness in it, which appealed to some people but by no means to all", and became "a steam-roller in arguments". She joined the Bach Choir and became obsessed with its director Hugh Percy Allen, dealing with her infatuation by playing the buffoon: the party end made a joke of her uneasy relations with him.

She was less uneasy with her women friends, but she was not a sapphist, even though her manner and her dress suggested this. She might be. She may have been, but she was intensely female. In later life she sent to Charles Williams, of all people, "a brief discourse upon BEDWORTHNESS", which makes this abundantly clear. (She was perhaps a type of large plain Englishwoman that is not uncommon – intensely attracted to men to a simple sexual way but knowing from experience that they are not attracted physically to her; she has dreams of romance, and by adopting a semi-feminine "masculine" camouflage, loud and combative, is being provocative in the

only way open to her.) She had no sexual experience until she was thirty; but before that she was deeply in love – not with Eric Whelpington, whom she worked with in France, as has sometimes been suggested, but with a writer, John Coursons, a Russian-born Jew. He kept a bundle of her letters and deposited them at Harvard, where Mr Brabazon has seen them. It was, he writes, "a relief" to find that Dorothy could let her defences down for once, and be in love like an ordinary woman, even though Coursons made her unhappy. He was the love of her life; she would have married him, and wanted to bear his children. He did not want marriage or children, and would only sleep with her if they took precautions. This she would not agree to do. She wrote to him, after they parted, that she was "a really rather primitive woman".

I mean, I really do feel (not think, certainly, but feel) it disgraceful to be barren . . . and I am disgustingly robust and happy-go-lucky about the actual process. And coarse and greedy like the woman in the comic medieval stories. And really quite shameless.

Coursons left England and Dorothy (still intact) in 1922; she had started working at Banson's advertising agency and was beginning her first Lord Peter Wimsey book, *Whodunnit*. On the rebound from Coursons she took up with a man from the motor-trade who had no scruples about the "actual process" or anything else: she soon found she was pregnant.

Dorothy was fond of the father of her child, who remains unidentified in these pages. He gave her a good time, he took her to the Homersmith Pals, and explained the technicalities of the combustion engine to her – it was to him that she owed the crucial clue of the airlock in the motorcycle feed pipe in *Unnatural Death*. But he did not want to marry her.

Her baby was looked after by her former playmate, cousin Ivy, who kept various other child-boarders at her cottage near Oxford and who was discreet. Dorothy may have considered being barren a "disgrace", but she did not find grace in motherhood. She sent cheques to Ivy regularly, and she kept in touch; but that's about all she did do when Anthony was young. James Brabazon treats a delicate matter delicately, perhaps over-delicately:

At first she went to Oxford as frequently as she possible could to the baby; but after eight or nine

uncertainly, in turn, and again, as if he'd forgotten

the sign of the cross, and the captain on a canvas stool

sat like a priest, with praying eyes and inclined head,

while his batman cut and curls fell all over his surplice.

Imagine the sun waking the flies to a confessional buzz

in the camp latrines, and each latrine, a trout box-kite

waiting for wind on the kind of day a man might read the Sunday paper by his pigeon cage, or nervously

walk out to bat and notice the green on a fielder's knee.

Craig Raine

Nobody grieves, nobody bleeds

By Gillian Freeman

JESSICA MANN:
Deadlier than the Male
An Investigation into Feminine Crime Writing
256pp. David and Charles. £9.50.
0 7153 7877 5

At the beginning of the Second World War, in common with many other writers, Dorothy Sayers offered her services to the Ministry of Information. She was not taken on. The reason appears in a note scribbled alongside her name in the Public Records Office. It reads: "Very conscious and difficult." She was, said Jessica Mann in her analysis of women crime writers, "vulgar, acerbic and boastful". A perverse quirk of character compelled Miss Sayers not only to conceal any finer personal qualities but to use her literary talent in a genre that would not be taken seriously by scholars: a (probably unconscious) defence against criticism. The question remains whether she revealed her inner self in fiction. Who else, in part at least, Harriet Vane? Would she have liked to have been Harriet Vane? Was she, like Harriet, in love with Peter Wimsey? Was Peter Wimsey? Was he based on Eric Whelpington, an Oxford friend? Was her husband "Mac" Fleming the prototype of the poisoned victim in *The Document*?

ments in the case and, if so, was Dorothy giving him a veiled warning that he was poisoning their life together?

Sayers herself vehemently denied any element of autobiography, though she made no secret of the fact that she used locations she knew intimately. Benson's Advertising Agency in *Murder Must Advertise*, and Somerville and Oxford in *Gondy Night*. "Well meaning readers," she wrote in *In the Mind of the Maker*, "who try to identify the writer with his characters or to excavate the author's personality and opinions from his books are frequently astonished by the ferocious rudeness with which the author often salutes these efforts at re-absorbing his work into himself. They are assaults on the independence of the individual which he very properly resents." (Bercous' rudeness, one might apply to herself, but from the others under Miss Mann's magnifying glass – Christie, Allingham, Marsh and Tregear – the response would have been a more ladylike rebuttal.)

Jessica Mann gives her book the subtitle "An Investigation into Feminine Crime Writing", and her chosen method is to put before the reader the conclusions and statements of others. She presents a few new clues of fresh evidence, and one cannot help wondering if she began her enquiry with hopes of a revelation. If so, these desperate ladies certainly deflected her search for expertise, with which they shared

their hero-detectives. Who knows what the enigmatic Wimsey or Poirot or Campton really thought?

"It is a pleasant game to trace the origins of fictional characters," writes Miss Mann, "and each player can find the evidence for his or her own guesses, since novelists almost invariably draw on their own experiences, and often, unconsciously, use traits of people they know." The students of the archaeologist Max Mallowan, second husband of Agatha Christie, believed him to be the stout model for Hercule Poirot; unaware that Poirot had been invented ten years before the couple met. ("I invent them, they are mine," the Christie said of her characters. "They've got to be my characters, doing what I want them to do, being what I want them to be – coming alive for me, having their own ideas sometimes, but only because I've made them become real." Sadly as Jessica Mann points out, Christie's characters are seldom more than manipulated puppets.)

Deadlier than the Male is divided into two parts: the first dealing in general terms with the rise of feminine crime writing, its heritage and its content; the second with biography. Miss Mann gives brief lives of the Big Four and an even briefer life (eight pages) of Josephine Tey, a curious inclusion because her novels do not really fit the genre. The materials are not even particularly interesting, and this, regrettably, is true of all the biographical detail, for the ladies, happy except for isolated

episodes – the brash Miss Sayers's illegitimate son and Mrs Christie's famous disappearance, both well documented – undramatic lives of really extraordinary dullness. There is no new explanation of *The Disappearance*, although it is fascinating to learn that Dorothy Sayers and her husband were among the amateur sleuths who rocked *The Silent Pool*, the site of Agatha's abandoned car, while she herself was living her assumed life in a Harrogate hotel.

Nothing significant links the lives of these five writers, although Jessica Mann makes much of the shared interest in theatre, play-writing, and the fact that they had their own plays performed at school. (This, surely, could be applied to many novelists, not only those concerned with crime?) It is not of course, Miss Mann's fault that the lives under scrutiny offer so little to arouse interest or stimulate the imagination, but she is responsible for the repetition which seeps from Part 1 into Part 2, and for the irritating habit of referring to herself as "this author" who, agreeing or disagreeing with a source, she takes Julian Symonds to task more than once.

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Dead Letter

He lifted the wicker lid and pigeons poured past his hands.

a ravel of light like oxygen escaping underwater.

Loss of privileges to peacetime; in war, a capital offence.

He offered no defiance, simply composed a non-existent life.

In letters home, enough for a year, to be posted in order.

of which the last began: Dear Mother, Dear Dad, Thanks for yours.

Today, a Tuesday, we shot a man in 1980 hours.

Try to imagine, if you can, the subdued feel of a Sunday morning and the quiet clank of a dial lid.

lifting and lapping like a censer at moss.

Imagine held hats, blown about hhr and the firing squad

down on one knee, close enough to see his Adam's apple.

gunshot just once before they fired.

And then imagine the rest of the day: the decent interval

before the men began to form a queue with mess-tins;

the way in which the day remained a Sunday until dark.

Things were touched with reverence. Even the sergeant,

feeling for fuss in his battle dress, patted his pockets

uncertainly, in turn, and again, as if he'd forgotten

the sign of the cross, and the captain on a canvas stool

sat like a priest, with praying eyes and inclined head,

while his batman cut and curls fell all over his surplice.

Imagine the sun waking the flies to a confessional buzz

in the camp latrines, and each latrine, a trout box-kite

waiting for wind on the kind of day a man might read the Sunday paper by his pigeon cage, or nervously

walk out to bat and notice the green on a fielder's knee.

Craig Raine

'The warning message arrived on Monday, the bomb itself on Wednesday. It became a busy week.'

Once again, the master thriller writer blends plot and counterplot with assurance and dexterity in one of the finest works of his career.

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A Dangerous Funeral by Mary MacMillan. At Philip Converse's funeral his family mourned for him – but one of them killed him and may kill again.

Live Bait by Bill Knox. Detective Superintendent Colin Thorne discovers the amphibian source of a European drug ring in the Scottish Highlands.

A Little Less Than Kind by Charlotte Armstrong. Happened twice to nightmarish when David Crown's new stepson believes that Crown killed his father.

So Much Blood by Simon Brett. While rehearsing a play

at the Edinburgh Festival, Charles Paris sees a murder committed and decides to investigate.

Streets of Death by Dell Shannon. Lieutenant Mondson and his colleagues in the Los Angeles Police Department face a number of particularly baffling crimes.

Killing with Kindness by Charlotte Armstrong. Happened twice to nightmarish when David Crown's new stepson believes that Crown killed his father.

So Much Blood by Simon Brett. While rehearsing a play

Keyhole Crime

months the visits grew gradually less frequent and the excuses for not managing to get to Oxford at that particular weekend more numerous. She had enough sense to know that she could be only one person who stood in the role of mother to the boy, and she was not the one.

It seems that she could not face the necessary emotional commitment. She has been disappointed by Anthony's father as she had been by John Cournoos, in whom she wrote that she was "terrified of emotion now". In this context Mr Brabazon's subtitle — "The Life of a Courageous Woman" — seems slightly inapt, and not only in this context: as he later comments, she "had obviously steered clear of going to the Front in the First War, and in the Second was only prepared to lecture within a limited distance from home because of the discomforts of war-time travel". In his summing-up he says that "by any reckoning Dorothy had a raw deal in a number of ways" — citing her solitary childhood, her lack of physical attraction, and the fact that the First World War robbed her, and her generation, "of the great majority of their potential mates". This fate was shared by many thousands. Dorothy, who had marketable talent, brains, and a forceful personality, fared better than most.

She even found companionship in marriage — to start with at any time. She did not want a fellow-scholar: "Marrying a highbrow (or living with one) would be like marrying one's own shop", she told Cournoos. She married "an archetypal Fleet Street man", Oswald Atherington Fleming, known as Mac, then working on the *New York World* as motor-racing and crime correspondent. This was helpful for her detective stories — though Lord Peter Wimsey, Mr Brabazon believes, was based on none of the men in her life but on her private fantasy and other literary figures — among them, the Scarlet Pimpernel and Bertie Wooster. (Harriet Vane was, of course, herself.)

Though her child was subsequently given the surname Fleming, and she got to know him better as he grew older, he never came to live with Dorothy and Mac. This was partly because when Mac lost his job he took to the bottle and became a problem — yet another semi-secret in her life. They lived at Witham in Essex, and few of her London acquaintances ever met him. She was domestically loyal; but once she had made friends with Charles Williams, who introduced her to Dante — and to his own friends C. S. Lewis and T. S. Eliot — Dante became "the man to whom she gave the rest of her life". She believed her translations of the *Divine Comedy* and her religious verse plays to be her true life's work. Most admirers of her twelve detective novels took the opposite view.

She kept up her London contacts through the Detection Club — G. K. Chesterton was its first president, and subsequently Dorothy herself. She was probably the author of its archly maudlin secret ceremonial, which she took enormously seriously: younger members "found that she treated the

whole thing with such solemnity as to deprive it of much of its fun".

The other main arena for her energies in later life was St Anne's House in Soho. It had been opened during the war by two Anglo-Catholic clergymen, Patrick McLaughlin and Gilbert Shaw, as "a sort of mission to thinking pagans". In its first course of lectures entitled "Christian Faith and Contemporary Culture" Dorothy spoke about drama. Here we can observe the tremendous and positive power of her personality in action; this was the first time that the author of this book saw Dorothy Sayers:

We sat in a hot, crowded dusty room, with too few chairs — and almost immediately forgot our discomforts. Such was the force of her enthusiasm, such her ability to communicate it, that the course of my life was changed. From that evening on, I knew what I wanted to do.

But all was not sweetness and light at St Anne's. The two founders diverged radically on matters of theology and policy and there were organizational difficulties. Dorothy, loquacious, argumentative, now "hugely fat" and careless of her dress to the point of mild eccentricity, was deeply involved in these skirmishes up to her teeth. There is one episode that reads like an outline for one of her own novels. (St Anne's, though Mr Brabazon does not say so, would make a marvellous setting for a murder story.) John Wren-Lewis, then Hon Sec of the society and "an exuberant, terrible" of a new generation of Christians, crossed with Dorothy on the status of science in relation to theology. "And the issue was joined in the vestry of St Thomas's Church, Regent Street" on the night of Maundy Thursday, 1954:

Exactly what was said there, we can only deduce from the letters which followed — some of which are missing. But the general terms of John's accusation are clear; and it is clear too that the attack was directed not only at Dorothy.

The outcome was not a corpse in the vestry or elsewhere but a seventeen-page typed letter from Dorothy to Wren-Lewis written on Good Friday. Although most of her early friendships turned out to be life-long, her true passions were of the mind, not of the emotions. As she wrote in that letter: "When the intellect is dominant it becomes the channel of all other feelings. The 'passionate intellect' is really passionate. It is the only point at which ecstasy can enter." Dorothy Sayers may have been a terror. But she was a holy terror.

She had lived alone, except for her cats, since Mac's death in 1950; and she died alone, of a stroke, just before Christmas 1957. Perhaps, writes James Brabazon, her spirit went on its way amused by the accuracy with which she had foretold it all long ago in *Have His Carcase*: "Wall, one day the usual thing happens. Blinds left down, no smoke from the kitchen chimney, milk not taken in, cats yowling fit to break your heart."

The ravages of time

By Robert Bernard Martin

PETER O'DONNELL:
The Xanadu Tailsman
288pp. Souvenir Press. £6.95
0 285 62412 1

When change and decay crowd in on every side, admirers of Modesty Blaise can take comfort in the knowledge that after all these years she is still alive and kicking (at the groin or solar plexus, of course), not to mention chopping necks, gouging eyes, and breaking arms. She has always been evasive about how old she is, but when we met her in 1965 Peter O'Donnell ungalantly guessed her to be twenty-six, which these days makes her nearer in age to the Prime Minister than to the slim young woman in the first book of the series. By rights she ought to be a little long in the tooth for all her activity, but she isn't even winded.

She still doesn't need a giraffe; her long legs are as spectacular as ever when wrapped around a man either to comfort or strangle him; her memorable breasts are weightless in her redundant bra; and though she has begun mistakenly to worry that her buttocks are sagging, apparently her lovely columnar neck and the underside of her arms haven't a trace of flab. Such enviable muscle tone is mere tribute to daily practice at garrotting and workouts with the wooden kongo she uses to paralyse

the nerve-centres of casual acquaintances. It all proves how much is within the reach of an middle-aged housewife who is prepared to take regular exercise but doesn't like jogging.

In spite of her ability to ward off so many of the normal ravages of time, Modesty is still plagued by the combination of bad luck and fierce loyalty that keeps storming calling her out of the retirement she embraced while only a slip of a thing. In *The Xanadu Tailsman* she is caught in the debris of a Casablanca hotel shaken down about her ears by an earthquake, and she is given the talisman of the title by a Frenchman with whom she is trapped, and who: life she saves from a murderous Arab. When the Arab's incompetence is put right by a masked figure with a napalm thrower, she sets out to avenge the Frenchman's death and finds that his killer is El Mido, who has taken over the reins of The Network, the international crime syndicate whose direction she relinquished on retirement. Accompanied by the adoring Willie Garvin, she chases El Mido from the Riviera to Corsica, then on to Morocco, where she has to revisit the scene of her first rape, by a dirty muleteer, at the age of fourteen (or was it twelve?). The climax of the action takes place in a stronghold in the Atlas mountains, where she and Willie face death at the unhygienic claws of a black panther.

As even such a necessarily inadequate synopsis indicates, over the years Peter O'Donnell has shifted his emphasis from the high camp

descriptions of Modesty's *home* culture, brand-name cars and details of her houses and cod language to non-stop action, a camp considerably where along the line. Modesty has never used to do, and it takes her nearly three hundred pages to get into her black jersey and pants with her hair and fingernails in order. It's still good fun, but it's unlike the girl we used to know.

There is some evidence that Peter O'Donnell shares a touch of the same that makes her first over the tautness of her *derrière*. For the first time that I can remember, she is upstaged sexually by another woman, one who is lusted after by several men who don't give Modesty as much as a considering glance. Here still, the rival is an English name who wears a plain blue dress with lace collar and sensible shoes, and her hair screwed into a bun.

True, Nannie performs some fairly unusual services for the two Holmes boys (now in their twenties) who charge, but she is a lady, with a "body firm and lithe" that of a woman ten years younger. Even Modesty's recurrent midnight being caught with scarcely a night cover her own lovely curves doesn't manage to distract attention from her younger competitor.

In the normal course of things, it can't be more than two or three years before Modesty is menopausal, but we needn't worry. If she does last turn into Miss Marple, she will be the fantasizing man's version of that lady.

Biting the bulletin

By Craig Brown

JOHN SIMPSON:
Moscow Requiem
237pp. Robson. £6.50
0 86051 135 9

SANDY GALL:
Chasing the Dragon
285pp. Collins. £6.95
0 06 22215 X

That John Simpson, Political Editor of the BBC, should have brought his skills as a reporter to his first novel is undeniably a coincidence. But it should have been chosen to use these skills on the reporting not of life, but of other people's thrillers. In particular Frederick Forsyth's *The Devil's Alternative* (1979) is upsetting. *The Devil's Alternative* is a more fully researched book in every way, begins with the disident assassination of an elegant, art-loving KGB chief, So does *Moscow Requiem*. *The Devil's Alternative* involves an Englishman and an unreliable Russian girlfriend, plenty of different countries, hostilities between the American President and the Soviet Party Secretary, and the world on the brink of war. So does *Moscow Requiem*.

No doubt influenced by television's belief that viewers must witness a change of scene every five minutes or they will switch off, John Simpson zooms to a new country on average every four pages. The reader will recognize each new country not from any freshness of description, but from the talks above each new section: "Moscow: Tuesday 23 July"; "London: Tuesday 23 July"; "Helsinki: West German border: Tuesday 23 July"; "Riyadh: Saudi Arabia: Thursday 1 August". The cartoon dictation further helps to pinpoint the country of origin of each speaker. "If this really is a major coup, and the King gets thrown out on his goddam ass, then screw Labor Day, we're going to have to get every body in here, but quick," says an American television producer.

In *The Devil's Alternative*, Frederick Forsyth (also, incidentally, a former BBC foreign correspondent) manages to give the impression of a global dilemma, managed to sweep from one end of the world to the next, by creating a logical progression of events arising out of an assassination. But Simpson doesn't play by the rules — he introduces a revolution or a torturing session or a shootout or a Camp David conference solely out of a (justifiable) lack of confidence in his main story, and this restlessness doesn't titillate, as it was presumably designed to, but merely irritates, like a cackling pub bore telling a shaggy dog story throwing in grating "anecdotes" on matters unrelated to anything. By the end if Simpson inserted the atomic destruction of the world into the middle of a paragraph it would probably pass unnoticed by the reader.

A traditional advantage of the genre is that it contains a sweetened bit of knowledge about politics or aeroplanes or nuclear reactors and so forth; and one might have expected a book by a political editor to be in even the tiniest way educational. But it is not. The banality of Simpson's political insight combines with the toy-town quality of his characterization to produce a particularly shoddy book. Here, for example, Simpson goes inside the head of the Soviet Party Secretary as he reviews an East Berlin commemorative parade:

All over Eastern Europe we've been in trouble, the Party Secretary thought, as he watched the Zil head for the far end of the parade. In Poland it needed firm action; and that brought them to heel. It won't last, but it's done the trick for the time being. Czechoslovakia seems completely quiet; no one there wants a repetition of 1968. Hungary could be difficult; still, too much money, too efficient, too many links with the West.

Sandy Gall's *Chasing the Dragon* also has a sexy and unreliable foreign girlfriend in it, though why this should be a foreign correspondent's theme one can only speculate. Gall is "a foreign reporter and troublemaker" (to quote the blurb) with TEN and bears many similarities to the hero of his book, who has the jarring name, "Alister Playfair". Based in Hong Kong, *Chasing the Dragon* is an old-fashioned thriller of the James Bond school. Tunnels, helicopters, cars out of control, desert islands, corrupt

officials and jocular girls about. Less ambitious than Simpson, Gall's content to let his own, reasonably good, story rattle along without involving the superpowers. There is something very attractively English about Gall's writing — even the cliché "Hammond's laugh conveyed the fact that he really was up against a madman." reassure one that things will happen as they should, that the bad baddies will be killed, the good baddies merely exiled, and the good will remain loyal and alive. The sharp contrast to Simpson, who rewards those readers who find the book with the only two decent characters undergoing a miserable separation.

Simpson avoids explicit sex; Gall prefers explosions, and danger. He occasionally has his hero find a woman to bed with Marie-Louise (a young lady, olive skin, a proud pair of breasts, a cloud of dark hair). Gall, who describes the event as "a mixture of orgasm and wrestling". That night she lay on her back, her skill and tenderness, kissing him from the lips down, down his chest across his flat belly, to the most sensitive and responsive part of his making him cry out with the most exquisite pleasure of her mouth. She lay on top of him and found, after a series of movements, each one leading skillfully and imperceptibly to the next, that he was crying in a climax which had her crying his name and sobbing under him, and they lay spent like dead swimmers in a deserted beach.

There is still much speculation over the influence that television exerted on the viewer, its influence on the presenter, who are in the front line, may be more advanced; certainly television journalism seems to encourage the descriptive powers to write what one feels that the authors of public books would be better to stick to dialogue and omniscient bulletins and to leave the camera crew in the rear to evoke landscape and character.

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Viewpoint

RUSSELL DAVIES

It is now so long since I read a work of crime fiction that I find it hard to imagine what motives there might be for doing such a thing. I have obviously got out of the habit of reconstructing motives. As for plots, they have not been killed by Roger Ackroyd, but I remember (as the Americans psychoanalytically put it) whether it was himself, the Narrator, Hercule Marple, or the Entire Cast equipped with cure-tipped grapefruit spoons, I may have been the one Miss Christie managed to pin on the reader. Edmund Wilson, indisputably, disposed of the corpse.

An affection lingers, perhaps, for one or two period stylists, principally Conan Doyle and Chandler. No free-lance writer is allowed to let his reading of Conan Doyle and Chandler lapse entirely, because both are perennially in demand in the parody market. Neither man, in any case, was really a crime writer at all. The Sherlock Holmes stories are curiously embroidered portraits of Holmes's criminal-style monomaniacal fastidiousness, while the Marlowe tales are built upon an aesthetically-masochistic morality designed to enable the dogbody harroast Marlowe-Chandler to earn, through pain, the right to consort with beauty. Chandler's wit disguises his grovelling, and as there's a lot of grovelling to disguise, his works are, in large part, highly amusing. (Italian intellectuals, steadfast fans of "gialli", as they call their yellow-jacketed pulp thrillers, find it hard to account for the special respect in which Chandler has been held here; but their translations, when you come to examine them, have plainly given up on Chandler's style of ingrained abuse. His crafted insults, the central feature of his wish-fulfilling social intercourse, read in flat Italian like the breakfast-table snarls of a European Everyman on a wet bank holiday.)

These tastes, I grant you, are desperately passé; but the modern masters of criminal fiction — your Patricia Highsmith movement — is out of my sphere. What drove crime fiction forth from the garden of my intellectual curiosity was the more localized reputation of men like, say, Lowell Lee Andrews. Mr Andrews's fame may have passed you by, and if I am almost sorry to acquaint you with him. Perhaps, nevertheless, you might find it useful to know that Lowell Lee — twenty-one stone in his horn-rimmed specs and "The Nicest Boy in Wolcott" according to the judgment of his local Kansas newspaper — ambled into his living room one November evening in 1958 and shot his sister, his mother and his father as they watched television. There had been no particular discord in the family. It was simply that Lowell Lee had secretly cherished an ambition to run away to Chicago and find employment as a hired hand. His employment in Wolcott of the family was to mow lawns, sell, his property, instead, if being 1958, he was hanged; the efficiency of the process in no way diminished by his ingestion of two whole fried chickens, plus all the trimmings, before departure. James Ruppert of Hamilton, Ohio, indulged in a similar homicidal dream on Easter Sunday 1975; though for him the task of family annihilation was a more demanding one: mother, brother, sister, four and seventeen bodies in all, had to go. Eleven bodies in all, Ruppert, who owned three hand-guns and a rifle, is quaintly credited with having achieved "the largest indoor massacre in criminal history." As performed, that is, by a single individual acting on what might pass for his own initiative.

These items come, thank goodness, not from some ghastly private file of memory but from an extremely public paperback book ("Shocking!" — *Pittsburgh Press*) called *Murder, USA*. It was published a couple of years ago by Ballantine Books of New York. It took a bit of finding, however, in the Fifth Avenue bookstores of that city. Indeed, books dealing frankly with crime seem to be sucked away in corners as

though in response to some city edict. There are remarkably few of them anyway, considering how much of an industry criminal activities constitute in the United States; and when you do find some popular work dealing with sensational details or even general trends in this field, it turns out to be squeezed in among the shadows cast by giant tomes on Minnesota real estate legislation. Almost invariably, non-fiction crime material is filed ideologically under "Law".

This euphemistic tendency, indeed, is a large part of Godwin's target — or rather, it lends a large calorific boost to the head of steam he builds up over the familiar theme of "too much law, not enough justice". The book is not really the traditional night-wing law-and-order rant, although it has certainly taken over a certain Winchell-esque tone and a Hooverian grimace. Three statements itemized on the dust-jacket give a fair idea of Godwin's belligerent pop tone, but also of the nature of the problem he is being belligerent about:

ITEM: Every 26 minutes an American man, woman or child is brutally slaughtered by criminal acts of violence.

ITEM: The entire nation of Great Britain has fewer annual killings than Manhattan alone.

ITEM: Only in America could a man convicted of dismembering two women be released on parole and savagely murder again.

The impact of Item 1 is neutralized, possibly, by the sheer size of America. In a fatalistic mood, one might be persuaded to believe that two murders an hour, from Tia Juana to Niagara, does not sound all that many. (The fact that 25,010 died from criminal violence in 1975 perhaps helps to correct that impression.) Item 2 does not sound so good though it has taken in the Northern Ireland figures; one hopes for Manhattan's sake this is so. But Item 3 is a recorded case and incontrovertible, and this is where Godwin's shrill and occasionally crackpot volume ("Alexander the Great [was] nineteen when he began his conquest of the known world — an age at which he wouldn't have been allowed to buy a drink in today's California") is able to score every time. It records what in my experience are much the most distressing cases of random mayhem and bestial denial of human dignity to have been seen outside the German and Russian socialist systems; and what's more, Godwin is in a position to top off each stomach-turning account with some vertiginous revelation about the parole possibilities open to the perpetrator we have just come to know and loathe. Parole-phobia is Godwin's thing.

I take his point. One never quite gets accustomed to America's hyperbolic sentencing system, or the plea-bargaining that continually robs it of whatever meaning it retains. Nor, one suspects, do American judges feel perfectly in control of it themselves. Take the case of Calvin Jackson, America's star mass-murderer of 1974, a porter at a New York hotel with the misleadingly imposing name of the Park Plaza. Jackson left eight old ladies in the Park Plaza, and generally slain in the Park Plaza, over a period of time, and it was not until he turned his monotonous attentions to the apartment house next door that the deeds were traced to him. This was no doubt remarkable in itself. The trial, like that of our own Peter Sutcliffe, was chiefly preoccupied with the question of diminished responsibility — a concept the jury threw out (as so many do in the Godwin survey) in favour of psychiatric polyannas, judging their work well accomplished in the seemingly healed person of Mr Jackson, should release him all too soon into a world still full of hotel-dwelling splinters. The judge, a portakot of the same sceptical mood as in Mr Godwin's words, "added his own touch of fantasy by giving him five life terms for killing — eighteen life terms all told. Which in practice meant that the defendant would not be eligible for parole until he was fifty-six." A Circuit Judge in Chicago, determined to get as close as he could to the possibility of extinguishing such eligibility altogether, sentenced a certain Henry Brisbon to 1,000 — 3,000

years in jail. Even this, the judge later explained, could only serve as an "indication" to parole boards examining Brisbon in future years.

Understandably, Godwin cherishes an idealized view of Great Britain. This nation, he claims, boasts fifty refuges for battered wives — better, admittedly, than the score of three he claims on America's behalf, but still not as adequate to our problem as he evidently supposes. We also have a Metropolitan Police Force specializing in what Godwin sees as an enviously efficient "heat therapy" for potential street gangs (this is, however, the "novelty" tactic widely held to have played a part in provoking un-Limeylike activities in Bristol and Brixton, so maybe second thoughts are in order). On the other hand, it is quite true that our judges say roughly what they mean, in arithmetical terms; that mass-murders are comparatively rare here, in spite of the revolting exception in Yorkshire; and that we are also relatively free so far as we know, in a country secretive even about its secretiveness — from cannibal killers like Edmund Emil Kemper III, whose appetites I shall not retell, and from the more elaborate, fantastical and decorative sadists like America's Hungarian import Geza de Kaplany, the "acid doctor" perpetrator of "perhaps the most horrendous single murder in American history", a revenge for his impotence.

What above all we still hope to remain free from, except in the political battle zones of Ulster, is the tyranny of the social no-go area; the dread of an inadvisable journey; the planned route that skirts expected trouble. But these precautions are being taken, by some among us; and what we certainly have already is what Godwin terms the "Urban American After-Dark Look" a panicky glance over the shoulder the moment footsteps sound down a lonely street. This is a familiar crepuscular feeling to most of us who live in cities. It was not until last year that I experienced it in daylight. Predictably, it was in New York, where a BBC colleague and I made an interviewing foray into what we realized, once we had been there, was the South Bronx. Over-sensitized to the perils of Harlem — some parts of which, I gather, are now opening up again to informed whites who have something better to do than stare — we were scarcely aware of the reputation of the South Bronx at all. Certainly we were unaware of it as an exhibition piece demonstrating the ultimate stage of urban decay" (Godwin) where the inhabitants "are drawing attention to their plight by burning down the neighbourhood". Had we even been advised that the local police station was known as "Fort Apache", I doubt whether we should ever have got out of the cab.

To do so was to step into an echoing urban blato — the fires have now gone, taking with them two-thirds of the buildings — plastered with surviving strips of garages, sheds and wire-meshed stores, and punctuated by tiled dormitory towers hoisting, at least in the case of the one that was our destination, a few score senior citizens of several races. Confronted in the lobby by a reception committee of rightly suspicious spruced older men, one perceived for the first time what it is like to live in an area where the law-abiding citizen, in effect, occupies the jail, while the criminal roasts the street below. "Perhaps the closest that men have yet come to creating hell on earth", Godwin remarks, and having been there I can almost forgive him for forgetting Germany once again. For a visitor, incidentally, the worst of the place is that having penetrated its borders one is very hard pressed to get out again. Even in the best parts of town, the New York subway is not inviting, and in the South Bronx it is more like a tenebrous, tumbledle crocodile pool. Cabs, meanwhile, the ones that are not whizzing through too heavily to contemplate stopping even for a moment, will not pick you up, the presumption being that your need may not be for transport alone. It was only thanks to the intervention of our interviewers, a

genial black percussionist whose working address by night is the ironically suburban One Fifth Avenue, that a cab-driver who had latched at a traffic light was persuaded that, our BBC tape-recorder being no death-dealing device, my colleague and I were worth the risk. Harlem, on the way home, looked more cheerfully hospitable and looser than I would have believed possible.

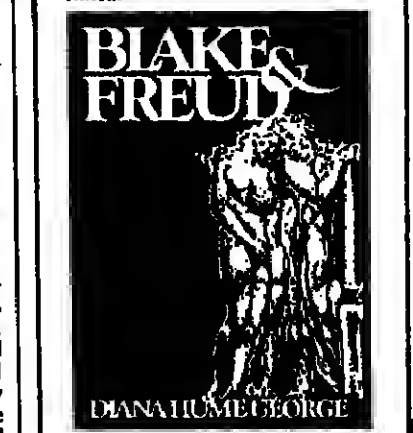
Awful though it was and is, this vision of an urban battlefield patrolled only by guerrillas, vigilantes and visiting babes in the wood does at least suggest socially remediable ills: poverty, unemployment, addiction, the important low expectations of the "ethnic minority" mentality — all the brutalities of need. But more futuristically chilling, in the end, or so I think after suffering Godwin's wrath to the last page, are the unaccountable violent binges indulged in by the new phenomenon called "the intelligent sociopath", the unit-social volunteer who exercises his will to extinguish life because he has come to the understanding that there's no reason why he shouldn't. This is a figure so blandly baffling — yet in the absence of the religious restraints conceivably so simple — that creative literature is still unsure what can be done with it, despite the pioneering work of Robert Musil and the nobly disgusting contribution of Truman Capote. What is so dreadful is that the bluest account of a career such as that of Howard Unruh, the appropriately named mass-murderer of Camden, New Jersey, says about all that can be told up about his case. Unruh had two Lagers (this was in 1949, when the name of the Lager still had the dismal fascination of totalitarianism to back it up) and one autumn day he simply decided to use them. Within ten minutes he had killed thirteen people, acquaintances and strangers alike. When the Camden *Courier Post* managed to get him on the phone, he was pleased to tell them that society continued to treat him well. "Nope, no body's done anything to me yet," were his words. "I'm doing plenty to them." Nobody who takes in the full flavour of such an utterance can seriously believe that peaceable civilians should be able to share their living-space with guns. The very shape of a gun — its little tube — indicates what it symbolizes and enacts: the confinement of human will in an unimaginably narrow space, leading explosively to the projectile of that will, destructively, upon others. The shape of the weapon, its pointing shape, invites the crime. To a weak mind it may seem to compel it, the resulting discharge releasing the electric tension in the clouded brain.

It seems to me inevitable that as the "anonymous" citizen becomes more and more aware that there is a general consciousness (an electronic communion, as your McLuhanite might have it) into which the individual can make an irruption that is dramatic, self-revolutionizing — that he can perform an act, indeed, that converts instantly into a reputation and a career — so the day of the delicately poised "circumstantial crime of violence begins to draw to its close. I do not suggest that crime fiction can shed no useful light on the biterlands of nihilism and ennui so suddenly exposed; merely that I find such illumination, at the moment, too capricious and intermittent to read by. In the age of the searchlight and the X-ray, who can see the flashlight of the sleuth?

Crime Fiction Criticism: An Annotated Bibliography, edited by Timothy W. Johnson and Julia Johnson (423pp. Garland Publishing, £20.00 £24.00 9490 5) catalogues 2,000 works of criticism on mystery and detective fiction including thrillers and espionage stories. The first section covers general works on crime fiction, among them reference works, books, dissertations and articles; the second section lists critical works on individual authors. Each entry contains a brief note summarizing the contents of the work cited.

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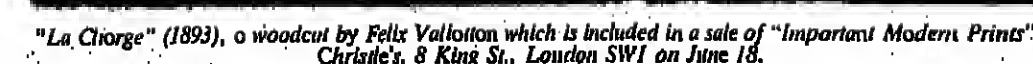
But this monstrous squandering of paper put an end to, there would be room in the encyclopedia, without putting impossible strain on the book's designers, for: first, an index of titles which would raise the book's usefulness as a reference work at least by the amount of the number of authors; second, and more authoritatively, for, though the clungushed advisors have already picked off all the large targets—the Chrises, the Chandeliers and the Le Carres—at a lower level

Though some of the critical essays are excellent - A. Norman Jeffares on Eric Ambler, George Grelle on Ian Fleming, George N. Dove on Ian McEwan, George Woodcock on Julian Symonds, Bo Lundin on Per Wahlbom and Maj Sjöwall - the general level is disappointingly low. The tone of some is flippantly journalistic, if others are academically ponderous. Far too many state the obvious, or confine themselves to retelling the plot of a few novels. Criticism is rare, exaggerated

The crime and mystery bibliographies are undoubtedly the most impressive part of the encyclopedia: a great amount of work has gone into them, and they seem, in general, to have been compiled with great care. Nevertheless, and perhaps inevitably, they are not free from error. The most

crime fiction have appeared over the last ten years, each with a different aim and a different attitude towards the genre. *A Catalogue of Crime* (1971), by Jacques Barzun and Wendell Meritt Taylor, is primarily an annotated reading-list; it concentrates on the books themselves, which it sums 'up wittily and tersely. Its judgements are often acerbic, but have been called eccentric and perverse. The *Encyclopedia of Mystery and Detection* (1976), edited

There has always been a close link (much deprecated by observers such as Sir Raymond Chandler) between the academic world and crime — especially detective — fiction. But from this volume it appears that — in the United States at least — it is rapidly getting beyond a joke. The list of contributors includes with Associate Professors: More sinister, however, is the discovery that university libraries are collecting the manuscripts of crime writers with the reckless abandon of drunken sailors. Princeton collects its *boomtown* Helen MacInnes, Jack Fenn and S. S.

[illegible]

Leys himself has certainly misled people whenever he has left the party line of language and culture and talked about politics. This is what he said when the US recognized China two and a half years ago: 'The "normalization" which Carter so rashly and irresponsibly improvised destroyed previous equilibrium and introduced dangerous instability. The Soviet Union has been needlessly provoked. Peking has been foolishly emboldened and Taipei feels cornered and pushed toward desperate and ominous decisions' (*New Republic*, 10/3/79).

As a matter of fact, I did indeed 'give offence' to Peking officials when I said, on the occasion of Liu Shaoqi's rehabilitation, "But can people believe in a Government that honors Liu yet fails to say who destroyed Liu?", and again: "The truth changes, but, curiously, the source of truth remains the same" (*New York Times* 16/5/80).

Why does Leys hate so? It may be because he feels China rejected him. Having studied its culture, he went there and instead of being welcomed as a hero from the cultural frontier, he found, stuck in the Peking Hotel, that China can be prosaic and maddening. His love for China was unrequited. All this would only be the story of one man's miscalculation if it were not for the fact that Leys, living still with his abstract China, continues to go on a rampage of hatred at finding the world different from what he had imagined it to be.

ing the issue from current attitudes to televised reports of events in Northern Ireland? At any rate, he can show us deeper awareness of what the Vietnam war meant to Americans, for whom the draft was a reality and the protest movement a reality too. I think I'd rather turn to the likes of Clive James as critic of television presents. At least Mr James hasn't the gall to misrepresent social history.

CHRISTOPHER MURRAY
University College, Dublin 4

Wrote all this in a notorious squandering of paper and ran and to, there would be nothing in the encyclopedia, without having the impossible strain on the book's backbone; for, first, an index of titles, which would raise the book's usefulness as a reference work at least by the amount of the number of authors; it is bulky and second, more authors are being mentioned than distinguished advisors have been picked out of all the large libraries, the Capitols, the Chandlers and the Curries, and so on.

Though some of the critical essays are excellent - A. Norman Jeffares on Eric Ambler, George Grelle on Ian Fleming, George N. Dove on Ed McBain, George Woodcock on Julian Symonds, Bo Lundin on Per Wahlbom and Mai Sjöwall - the general level is disappointingly low. The tone of some of the supposedly journalistic, or otherwise academically ponderous, far too many of the essays is reminiscent of the kind of state lie obvious, or corflime them selves to retelling the plot of a few novels. Criticism is rare, exaggerated

The crime and mystery bibliographies are undoubtedly the most impressive part of this encyclopaedia: great amount of work has gone into them, and they seem, in general, to have been compiled with great care. Nevertheless, and perhaps inevitably, they are not free from error. The most

Three large reference works on crime fiction have appeared over the last ten years, each with a different aim and a different attitude towards the genre. *A Catalogue of Crime* (1971), by Jacques Barzun and Wendell Meritt Taylor, is primarily an annotated reading-list; it concentrates on the books themselves, which it sums up wittily and largely in its judgements are often acerbic, but have been called eccentric and perverse. The *Encyclopedia of Mystery and Detection* (1976), edited

There has always been a close link (much deprecated by observers such as Sir Raymond Chandler) between the academic world and crime — especially detective — fiction. But from this volume it appears that — in the United States at least — it is rapidly getting beyond a joke. The list of contributors includes with Associate Professors: More sinister, however, is the discovery that university libraries are collecting the manuscripts of crime writers with the reckless abandon of drunken sailors. Princeton collects its *boomtown* Helen MacInnes, Jack Fenn and S. S.

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desl less culpable than the first — is disposed of, I thought, just a bit too conveniently.

PDJ Yes, [laughs] this is a justifiable criticism. The intention was that this particular death should have been not absolutely suicide, but one of those road accidents which occur because someone, subconsciously, doesn't want to go on living. But it does seem a bit too neat. The device of the off-stage exit isn't uncommon, of course, and it seems to suggest that writers and readers require some kind of retribution in the story — if the murderer isn't to be hanged, then he's got to be got rid of somehow.

PC At least you don't resort to the train in Serbia and the bullet through the heart.

PDJ I suppose it brings us to *Oscar Wilde's* definition of fiction as something in which the good triumph and the bad are punished. And this is one reason why, for some people, the detective story — however good it is — will always be classified as a sub-literary form, because of the contrivances, and because, in the past, psychological truth was too often sacrificed to the demands of the plot.

PC But it's always possible to work within a formal framework and adapt it to your own purposes.

PDJ Tho more so, I think, because the novel is itself an artificial form; it's always imposing some kind of pattern on reality, which, after all, what detective stories do. And the modern detective story has moved away from the earlier crudities and simplifications. Crime writers are as concerned as other novelists with psychological truth and the moral ambiguities of human action.

PC In fact, you use the detective framework to express some fairly complex ideas — what happens, for instance, when personal freedom and the power of action are threatened, as in *Shroud for a Nightingale*, where about half the characters are trying to exercise power, in some sense, over someone or other.

PDJ Also, in some books, the idea that love can be a great deal more lethal than hate; and the fact that, in an extraordinary way, good may or may not come out of evil, but, paradoxically, evil much more often comes out of good.

PC In your second novel you have someone remark that "most murders are sordid, little crimes bred out of ignorance and despair". This, I think, refers to real-life murders, not the sort of crimes your books deal with. Murders in fiction are always on a much larger scale, and depend for their impact on interesting complications.

PDJ Yes, obviously there's a tremendous difference. The great majority of actual murders, in this country at least, are domestic. They happen because people are simply at the end of their tether. The number of homicides in which the victim isn't known to, or related to, the aggressor, is quite small; the motives usually are very obvious; and many of these crimes are fairly easy to detect, even if the guilty person doesn't confess, which happens quite often. In fiction, of course, we find devious crimes with very obscure motives, and a reasonable number of suspects. The detection is complicated, and requires a fair degree of deductive intelligence.

PC You've written one book, though, in collaboration with T. A. Crichley — *The Maid and the Pear Tree* — which is a factual account of some London murders.

PDJ It's about the murder of three families in the East End of London — off Ratcliffe Highway (a terrible slum highway) in 1811. I first read of the case in the *Newgate Calendar*. It's also the subject of *The Quincey Murder Confessions* (a *True Art*). It was assumed that the suspect, John Williams, who committed suicide in prison, was responsible for the crimes; but we felt he wasn't. That he was a kind of fall guy. We had great fun searching out the papers, and the correspondence of the time, and the interest in it finding out what the East End was like then. Most of the people concerned worked in the docks and the first victim was an ex-convict. And it was fascinating to discover how violent crime was investigated in those

days. This case did lead to some demands for reform of the police, and to debates in parliament. What is interesting, too, is the amount of outrage these murders caused, especially as one tends to think of early nineteenth-century London as a violent place and murder a fairly common crime. After the suspect had been found hanged, his body was paraded through the East End with the instruments, the knife and so on, they thought he'd used. This rather gruesome procession halted in turn outside the houses of all the victims; and eventually the supposed culprit was buried at a crossroads, with a stake through his heart — all this as late as 1811.

PC It's obvious that a lot of careful research goes into your novels; you seem to take trouble to get all the details right, from the technical aspects of an investigation (for example, the scientific principle of electrophoresis which is described in *Death of an Expert Witness*) to the daily routine in a Nurses' Home. I suppose some of this can be put down to your own experience of the settings described.

PDJ Yes, I don't think I could write a successful book that was set somewhere I'd never visited, never known, never been interested in, or one that had to do with a way of life that was totally alien to me — I like to write to that extent out of experience. But once I've devised the plot and the complications, I do a great deal of reading and research to make sure that the forensic and technical details are right.

PC Your last novel, *Innocent Blood*, is not in fact a detective story. Why did you decide to change to a different narrative form?

PDJ I think simply because this particular plot seemed to require a change of method — though the material could have been used in an orthodox detective story. The adopted eighteen-year-old in search of information about her parents — the character, could have been a danger to someone who found it necessary to put her out of action. But somehow I felt I wanted to do rather more with the theme. I wanted to write about the search for identity, revenge, redemption, if you like; and therefore I decided this had better be a novel that wasn't a straightforward detective story and wouldn't feature Dalgleish, and it developed in that way. The basic idea came to me partly as a result of the Act of Parliament which gave adopted children the right to see copies of their original birth certificates, and partly because of a real-life murder which I remembered. This took place over twenty years ago, when the death penalty was still in operation. A young man went to visit his wife and newly-born son in a nursing home in North London. On the way home he called in on his parents-in-law and battered them both to death with a television aerial. I can remember, at the time, thinking about the new-born baby and wondering what on earth was going to happen to him — I mean when he started asking questions about his missing relatives. How on earth do you explain to the child that his father was hanged for murdering his grandparents? I suppose this was at the back of my mind; and then, when the 1975 Children Act was passed, I began to think: suppose this led to some really rather dreadful disclosure. How would this affect the young person who had, as most parents do, fabricated some kind of acceptable persona for herself?

PC In fact you've lumbered your heroine, Philippa Palfrey, with absolutely the worst sort of hereditary imagination — father a rapist and mother a child-murderer. Yet, in a sense, the novel reverses one of the themes of *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman*, in which Mark Callender is doomed, you might say, because of who his parents were. Philippa flourishes in spite of hers.

PDJ Having written about Philippa, who was at least initially a very difficult and rather unlikable character, I am finding it pleasant at the moment to be writing again about Cordelia Gray, who I think is basically an extremely agreeable and sympathetic young woman. It's a rather refreshing return to the classical detective story, though this doesn't mean that I won't try something different again in the future.

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The Swami's locked room

By J.I.M. Stewart

H.R.F. KEATINGE:
Go West, Inspector Ghote
213pp. Collins. £5.95.
0 00 231289 1

Unlike the majority of fictional detectives, H.R.F. Keatinge's Inspector Ghote of the Bombay Police is a man much like ourselves only more so: diffident, misjudging his own powers, often sadly muddled by the unaccountable happenings assailing him. But at the same time he is endowed with a dim saving obstinacy and occasional flashes of anger which between them see him safely to the end of the road. Like Richardson's Sir Charles Grandison, he is typed to move through a variety of trying situations in which he comforts himself, if not like Sir Charles "uniformly well", yet with a pertinacious devotion to common sense which unfailingly enables him to point out something not obvious to more aggressive policemen or private eyes in the final moments of a complex criminal affair.

Sometimes at the beginning of an investigation this tone is established by the abrupt projecting of the Inspector into an enormous room in which there is an enormous desk behind which sits an important personage amid a battery of telephones and electric typewriters. In *Phini, Phini, Inspector Ghote*, 1976, he was still half at home, since the

showbiz dazzle suddenly confronting him is sited in the Bollywood film studios of his native city. But in *Go West, Inspector Ghote* the case is very different. Bollywood has become Hollywood, and it is through Beverly Hills that he is driven to his new assignment by an appalling Californian called Fred Hoskins, an unsuccessful policeman who has set up as a private investigator. In Beverly Hills, Hoskins tells Ghote, are to be found "some of the most luxurious homes in the world". Ghote does his best to keep his end up, retorting that "In Bombay also our film stars are having most posh homes". Hoskins is not impressed.

And as with dwellings so with places of religious retreat. The traditional ashram — or so the *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us — "is built of wattle and mud, and its roofs are of leaves". But in California the establishment of the celebrated Swami Without a Name is a more imposing affair. There is a Visitors' Centre in which one can buy, among other things, an "Electronic Meditation Timer", and "Yoga Pants" ("Guaranteed Made in India"). The Meditation Hall with its big pure white dome is reminiscent of the control tower at Los Angeles airport. The Swami's private dwelling is a large square log cabin with no windows, only one entrance, and with a roof that appears as a tall spiral made out of translucent orange plastic. Here, we guess at once, is the setting for a classical locked-room mystery.

So it proves. Ghote's mission is to redeem from the Swami's thrall the daughter of a wealthy Sindhi business-

man in Bombay. But before much can be done about this the Swami's body is found, with its throat slit, as they say, from ear to ear, and no trace of a weapon to be found. Moreover, the chamber's only entrance chances to have been under the observation of Ghote himself at the time the fatality must have occurred. The purity of the problem is perhaps a shade impaired by a general acceptance of those most concerned of the fact of bi-location. In India it is quite common for sacred persons to enjoy the power of instantaneously transporting themselves from one place to another.

There is commonly something disconcertingly mechanical about these locked rooms, and Mr Keatinge's new story is no exception. But his merit, which is very considerable indeed, lies quite elsewhere. When in *Inspector Ghote Hunts the Peacock*, which appeared in 1968, Mr Keatinge brought his hero to England he revealed himself as commanding a comedy of the international situation such as might have won the admiration of Henry James himself. Mr Keatinge has an eye, and in the present story perfectly renders English as she is spoken in India and the United States. Mr Keatinge has an eye: "Eat All You Want," Speed sneaked by Altrank. "If your dog a piskey eater," Most of all you need a Fashion Kitchen. The effect of all the shouting, whether on the freeway or TV or the voice from the nightmarish Hoskins, upon so authentically rendered Indian sensibility seems to me the principal attraction of this otherwise slightly run-of-the-mill detective story.

Sticking to the rules

By Jessica Mann

ANTONIA FRASER:
A Splash of Red
229pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
£5.95.
0 297 77937 0
SARA WOODS:
Cry Guilty
190pp. Macmillan. £5.50.
0 333 30976 6

Many of the best contemporary crime novels offer much more than simple tales of complicated events, but there are still readers eager for detective novels in which human behaviour is of less interest than a puzzling plot; and there are still writers producing them, though historians of literary styles have long since declared the genre dead. Sara Woods has been writing these for twenty years; Antonia Fraser is a relatively newcomer, interspersing her major historical biographies with the adventures of Jennima Shore.

Jennima Shore, Investigator, as she is called on her sociological television programme, and as she is often addressed, in full, has a habit of stumbling across corpses. This is such an unlikely occurrence that most fictional detectives these days are policemen; but that is only the ideal suspension of disbelief required of the reader. As "rogueable" and as pursued as *Go West, Inspector Ghote* belongs to *Go West, Inspector Ghote* (1978) she sought solitude in a holiday house on a remote Scottish island. In *A Splash of Red* she takes a different form of isolation, planning to go to ground by day in the British Library, and by night in a flat left by her friend Chloe. She finds Chloe in bed with her throat cut, and consequently becomes involved not only with Chloe's parents but also with her numerous lovers, trying one out for herself before realising which of them was the murderer. The book does with the traditional confrontation of all the suspects by the amateur detective.

It was Ogden Nash who invented the term "Hick-Bit-Know", for crime stories that concern foolhardy and foolish police who need only to be warned of danger to rush into it alone.

As he put it in another verse: "Had she told the dick/had she got in that fix/I would be much apter to read the last chapter." Jennima Shore may be a mild-mannered woman, but she is certainly foolhardy. She receives a succession of intruders in her borrowed flat, never thinking to lock the windows which they use to enter it. She pluckily comes through being hit about the face, being locked in and locked out, and being deceived by one and all. But those grotesque happenings buffets her heroine through a charming landscape, or city scape. The coovent school for Antonia Fraser's first novel, the Scottish Highlands in the second, and now a well-described Bloomsbury in this third, almost lend the plots verisimilitude. Some of the characters may be drawn from life, too, for there is a whiff of in-joke about them, and readers of these pages may well recognize Jamie Grand, editor of "a deeply pompous and deeply powerful paper".

Dorothy L. Sayers once wrote that "well meaning readers who try to identify the writer with his characters are frequently astonished by the ferocious rudeness with which the author himself salutes these efforts". Yet her own Harriot Vane had so much in common with Sayers that it has invariably been supposed that one is an idealized self-portrait of the other. In Jennima Shore, we meet a character who is described in terms similar to

those used about her creator by many columnists, and it will be tempting for future biographers to deduce his contemporary biographer's tastes from her mild-mannered woman, but she is certainly foolhardy. She receives a succession of intruders in her borrowed flat, never thinking to lock the windows which they use to enter it. She pluckily comes through being hit about the face, being locked in and locked out, and being deceived by one and all. But those grotesque happenings buffets her heroine through a charming landscape, or city scape. The coovent school for Antonia Fraser's first novel, the Scottish Highlands in the second, and now a well-described Bloomsbury in this third, almost lend the plots verisimilitude. Some of the characters may be drawn from life, too, for there is a whiff of in-joke about them, and readers of these pages may well recognize Jamie Grand, editor of "a deeply pompous and deeply powerful paper".

The thirty-second episode in the forensic career of Sara Woods' impersonal barrister hero is quite unlike anything to be found in Antonia Fraser. No suspicion of *romantic-chef* here. For Sara Woods lives in Canada, and her stories in London, and has not allowed her running characters (two three lawyers and their wives) to mature in twenty years. Her plots and legal details are, as always, meticulous, and the individuals who appear as clients or opponents are at rounded as they would have seemed to their legal advisers in real life. It is those touching legal lawyers, who reduce the reader's pleasure in what are otherwise well-written and excellently plotted mysteries. For Sara Woods' stories, like Antonia Fraser's, conform to the rules that need to appear in such manuals as *Mystery Fiction, Theory and Technique* (1971). The readers of neither will need the help of another curious volume, perhaps the most obscure publication of 1947, called *How to Enjoy Mystery Fiction*.

Barbara Michaels' rather woody-woody title *The Walker in Shadows* (242pp. Souvenir. £6.95. 0285 62460 1) does not give much indication of what her novel is actually about. In fact it is a curious hybrid between an old-fashioned ghost story and a contemporary sentimental romance — out of *Edith Wharton* by Barbara Cartland, as it were. It relates what happens to a nice nurse Pat (recently widowed), and her handsome student son, when a gorgeous blonde Kathy and her satirical lawyer father move to next door. "His caught her unaware, and for a few moments after that she didn't even hear the knocking." Meanwhile a Confederate soldier, though less than a ghost, is haunting the focus of a series of psychic upheavals: expensive items of furniture fly through the air (no-one seems to worry what the insurance company will think), mysterious phantoms light and spiralling col-

Julia Briggs

Translating the Stoic sage

By C. H. Sisson

W.S. MERWIN (Translator):
The Satires of Persius
Introduction and notes by
William S. Anderson
109pp. Anvil Press. £3.95.
0 85646 019 2

When Persius died at the age of twenty-eight his manuscripts were not despatched to the vaults of a university library; a kindly friend destroyed his earlier works altogether. This left the six *Satires* which he is known to have written first published in the United States in 1951. It is now made accessible here, with so excellent an introduction by William S. Anderson.

Persius was born in AD 34, that is to say towards the end of the reign of Tiberius; his early death was in the reign of the artist Nero. Persius "belonged to the upper classes...," says professor Anderson. "His family possessed the property qualifications to make him a knight; besides, he was linked by relationship and marriage to the Senatorial class." Coming from somewhere between Rome and Genoa, he was naturally sent to Rome for instruction by the best masters. One of these was "the eminent grammarian Remmius Palaemon, who must," Anderson suggests, "have communicated to his pupil some of his basic love of language." Whether or not the future poet owed this grammatical instruction, he was undoubtedly influenced, in his general view of the world, by another of his tutors, the Stoic Annaeus Cornutus, who first placed a steady hand on his shoulder when he was fifteen or sixteen. The tone of Persius's family must have been friendly to Stoicism; when he was eight years old a female relative, possibly an aunt, committed a distinguished suicide to show her husband, who had been ordered to kill himself, how to do it. Cornutus was from the household of

Seneca, with whom Persius became acquainted, as he did with Seneca's nephew Lucan, the poet of the *Pharsalia*. (Another of Lucan's uncles was that Gallio who, as "deputy of Achaia," told the Jews who "made insurrection" against Paul that, if it were "a question of words and names" and of their law, he would have nothing to do with it.)

Cornutus was not only a Stoic philosopher but a tragedian, and he wrote "treatises on orthography and on the allegorization of myth"; there was already, about these literary circles of post-Augustan times, something which we should call academic, as compared with the world of Horace and Vergil — to say nothing of that of Catullus and Lucretius — though the final refinements of Ausonius's circles were still centuries away. Persius himself seems to have been more susceptible of academic influences than either Martial (born AD 38) or Juvenal (born AD 55) — partly, perhaps, because he was grander, socially, than either of those temperaments. There is something aristocratic and not quite like life about him. He kept aloof from the corruptions of the court, as they say, but it is not only that. Persius, as Anderson has it, "does not strike most readers as sufficiently experienced." He probably spent too long on all those books of Chrysippus. "He is the Stoic sage in his private paradise." He talks to his audience as though it were composed of Stoics able to comprehend his dogmas, or fools utterly beyond the reach of rational appeal. With this went a style compressed in the extreme, deliberate — he was a slow writer — and ingenious. He is "a very dark Author" as Swift said. All these characteristics amount to a poet difficult to translate in any age and, one would have thought, not offering any ready accessibility in our own.

Merwin must, indeed, have had a very hard task. Anderson describes him as a "poet sympathetic with his material", but a style which is over-

wrought, as that of Persius may be said to be, has very great dangers for any translator. Merwin allows himself more lines than the original — about a third more, in the first satire. Given the nature of the text and the difference between the genius of the two languages, the extra allowance is not large. But what exactly has the translator to aim at? Not a conversational style, for that is not exactly what Persius gives us, even when he is writing what purports to be dialogue. Yet of course there is a conversational element. So we get:

Guess the origin of those mincing lyrics which give
The seated gentry such pleasure?

That you can't save some old geezer's bacon without wanting
A pat on the back?

One has the impression of conversational phrases squeezed into a strait-jacket of artificiality: a combination which certainly corresponds to some-

thing in Persius. Should we ask for an esse the original does not have? The answer perhaps is Yes, unfair though that sounds. Mr Pope "would know whether it is designed for an elegant Translation, or only to show the Meaning." A huge loss from the original is inevitable, but no translation that is for more than "only to show the Meaning" can avoid the necessity of being governed, in the last resort, by the language into which it is being made.

Anderson asserts that "in many respects Persius's virtuosity, coupled as it is with passion, can say more to us and our literary sensibilities than it could to many an age before our time." This is what the translator has to prove, by the liveliness of his language. With Merwin this liveliness extends sometimes to the phrase, occasionally to the sentence, rarely to the paragraph. The result is a version which will certainly be helpful in giving a notion of what

Persius wrote about, the sort of man he was and the kind of satire he wrote. It does not quite amount to bringing Persius alive for us, which could perhaps only be done by taking him by the scruff of the neck, as Dryden did. Dryden allowed himself something like twice as many lines as Persius, but for Merwin's:

Not give a clipped coin for a hundred of your highborn Greeks
We get

And prize a hundred Zeno's, just as much
As o elipt Sixpence, or a Shilling Dutch

No-one is to be blamed for not writing as well as Dryden, and Merwin probably did the right thing to be more patient with his author. Certainly his version, with Professor Anderson's introduction, makes a useful addition to the Anvil Press's excellent series of translations.

An honourable man

By Robin Seager

M. L. CLARKE:
The Noblest Roman
Marcus Brutus and His Reputation
157pp. Thames and Hudson. £10.
0 500 40040 7

This curious book falls into three sections, all brief: a historical biography of Brutus; an examination of his reputation through the ages and his role in debates on the ethics of tyrannicide; and an extremely sketchy review of the largely uninspired and uninspiring works of literature in which he plays a part.

The history is somewhat antiquated and at times careless. Cato's mission to Cyprus is presented as planned by the coalition, which denies Clodius credit for a brilliant improvisation, made possible only when Cato chose as his province Syria instead of Cilicia as originally intended. Cato's expressions of good-will towards A. Claudius are impulsively taken at their face value. By his *pro* M. Brutus is said to have been "aligning himself with Cicero and the senatorial party against Caesar and the populist party". Status Marcus appears as Statius, while the left-over Pompeian Caelius Bassus is mislabeled a Caesarian. In 44 Antony wanted Gallia Comata, not Transalpine, with Cisalpine.

Several problems are glossed over, especially in the account of Brutus's early career. That his father was legate to the rebel Lepidus is not made clear, and the version of his death least favourable to Pompey is retailed without a hint that other stories exist. The discussion of Brutus's date of birth is unsatisfactory; it may well be true that Cicero's version must prevail, but one would like to know the nature of the evidence that supports Veljeus. However, the tale that Brutus was Caesar's son is very properly dismissed. The related questions of the identities of Brutus's adoptive father and of the rejected fiancé of Caesar's daughter Julia may both admit of no answer, but they deserve better treatment than they get here. The significance of Brutus's marriage to Porcia is another unsolved puzzle, but it is right not to speculate about relations between her and Servilia. In the notorious affair of the Salaminian loss it is surely too charitable to suggest that Brutus was perhaps unaware of at least some of the excesses of his agents; on the other hand it is fair criticism of Cicero to point out that his outrage rapidly evaporated when the matter ceased to be an embarrassment to himself.

So to Brutus the conspirator. That his motives were honourable is taken for granted throughout, and is probably true. But the admittedly not outrageous assertion of Nicolaus of Damascus that the leading conspirators wanted to take over Caesar's power interests discussion, even if it is to be rejected. Too much is made of Brutus's alleged hereditary duty of opposition to despotism and the poli-

tical significance of his coins: he had after all no other necroscopers worth recalling. It was no sign of moral respectability, nor was a symbol of devotion to freedom, that he was essential to the plot. Besides, in use, all precedents were irrelevant: a peripatetic dictator was a new phenomenon, beyond the reach of any check less than assassination, a point well taken, as M. L. Clarke later observes, by Montesquieu.

The treatment of the period from the Ides of March to Philippi is the best part of Clarke's book. The reasons why the republican constitution did not start to work again of its own accord, as the conspirators seem to have hoped that it would, are well expounded. Every act of moderation on their part, however commendable morally, was fated to prove politically disastrous. Brutus, Cassius and their supporters passed rapidly from fidelity to illegal action while the initiative shifted to Antony, Octavian and Cicero. Brutus's attitude to Cicero's cultivation of Octavian is particularly revealing of the man. His criticisms are formulated entirely in terms of moral principles, not of political feasibility; it is clear that he had not the faintest idea of what Cicero was in fact trying to achieve. Clarke too faults Cicero for trusting Octavian, which Cicero surely never did. He was not even really outmanoeuvred intellectually by the boy wonder; it was merely his fate and his own initiative gave Octavian at the crucial moment a military superiority against which Cicero had no resource. Brutus's comments on Cicero's death may stand as a monument to his political stupidity as well as to his self-righteousness.

The same combination of personal ineptitude and inexorable fate which had dogged the conspirators from the first is again well brought out in Clarke's narrative of the prelude to Philippi and the battle itself. (But the discussion of the fate of Xanthus should have mentioned that this was the third time on which the Xanthians had allegedly given way to their mysterious death wish, though the significance of that fact for his history may be debated.) On Brutus's and Clarke's preference to follow Plutarch in letting him die with his faith in virtue unshaken; method as well as sentiment commands this choice.

It is largely no fault of the author that the second section seems superficial. Most of the writers whose work he discusses knew virtually nothing about Brutus and cared less. In later Rome the rapidly established schematic contrast between Brutus and Cassius rendered most judgments valueless, while the intervention of Christianity added nothing of interest. More might, however, have been said about Crenatus Cordus, and it may be unjust to Tibullus to imply that the *imagines* of Brutus and Cassius were not allowed to appear in Julia's funeral procession. But in the end the historian must be chiefly struck by the wildness of the fantasies of Drumm, Zumpt and Garthausen, and the fact that the hero, which cannot but induce in him a mood of sombre and, it is to be hoped, salutary self-doubt.



This photograph of a fragmentary, posthumous portrait of Pompey is taken from *The Image of Augustus* by Susan Walker and Andrew Burnett (1979). British Museum Publications. £2.95. 0 7141 1270 4.

The Roman general

By T. P. Wiseman

PETER GREENHALGH:
Pompey: the Republican Prince
200pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
£10.50.
0 297 77881 1

Until three years ago, there was no full-length biography of Pompey in English. Now there are three. John Leach's *Pompey the Great* (1978) is a worthy effort, but out of the line of the subject; Robin Seager's *Pompey: a Political Biography* (1977) is wholly admirable within its limits of reference, but it was war, not peace, that made Pompey great. Now comes Peter Greenhalgh's two-volume *The Roman Alexander* (reviewed in the TLS in 1980), and *The Republican Prince* (1981), artificially divided for the publisher's convenience, but forming a single biography of a man more than twice as lavish as that of his predecessors. It is an impressive work — not a total success, but with virtues that usefully complement those of Seager.

It is to sense, the lavish scale is a fault, even from so well-documented a period as the mid-first century BC, the coverage is bound to be uneven, depending on the detail of the sources — or indeed the nature of the source material at all. A good example is provided by an account of the Civil War. Pompey is shown as a competent general, but his skill before the altar of political expediency, or a senatorial debate, is shown in terms of angry hawks swooping over thick-skinned emallies. But when we get Pompey in 52 opening legal floodgates to swell a torrent of litigation that would scour

but was got ten pages of detailed narrative about their vicissitudes, followed by: "How Pompey reacted to the news of the capitulation of his army in Spain and the fall of Massilia we do not know." What we want to hear about is Pompey's main strategy: the details of his collection of forces in the East, the state of his confidence and his army's morale; but the evidence — Caesar's *Commentaries* — concentrates on the side-show in Spain, and that is what the narrator is forced to give us.

Greenhalgh is above all a military historian, and he is at his best with the narrative of the Civil War. He offers a sound and convincing defence of Pompey's strategy against the criticisms of Cicero's distraught letters to Atticus and the simplistic hindsight of the later sources; and in the details of the campaigns he handles Caesar's necessarily partial account with an exemplary critical finesse. To some extent the same is true of the political history, particularly in his insistence on Pompey's dominant position throughout the "fifties" and the impact of his theatre complex and what Marx the political narrative is a self-indulgent extravaganza of style which Greenhalgh does not permit himself when describing warfare.

It may, I suppose, be all right to make a whole substantial paragraph out of the sustained metaphor of the "state physician" — though it is a *mur de* — but the reader's attention is attracted by what is being said to the way the author is saying it. It may cause no more than a wry smile to be asked to imagine Cicero proscribing his former ally before the altar of political expediency, or a senatorial debate, shown in terms of angry hawks swooping over thick-skinned emallies. But when we get Pompey in 52 opening legal floodgates to swell a torrent of litigation that would scour

Between brass and silver

By Helen McNeil

JOHN ASHBERRY:
As We Know
118pp. Carcanet. £4.95.
0 85635 357 4

DAVID LEHMAN (Editor):
Beyond Amaze: New Essays on John Ashbery
294pp. Cornell University Press.
0 8014 1235 8

JONATHAN HOLDEN:
The Rhetoric of the Contemporary Lyric
136pp. Bloomington, Indiana.
Indiana University Press. £7.80.
0 253 15667 X

Since the death of Robert Lowell, the title of most important American poet has been on offer to John Ashbery. In "Litany", the magnificent long poem that begins *As We Know*, Ashbery has taken up that title while declining the magisterial stance that usually goes with even an unofficial laureateship. Only late Wallace Stevens and the Auden of *In Praise of Limestone* can stand comparison to "Litany's" great meditation on the incomplete metamorphoses of the middle phase of life. In "Litany", we are lost, but not in a dark wood. We wander in Ashbery's recurrent images of blandly beautiful suburbia; or we contemplate the foot of a purgatorial hill, "ignoring end then announcing its edge"; or we gaze at a sunset of a landscape or shipwreck without ship described as natural scenes but also taken from Caspar David Friedrich paintings.

The length and wearied ambition of "Litany" mark it as a major continuation of the argument of Stevens's "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven". To this extent it validates Harold Bloom's view of Ashbery as inheritor of an American tradition passing from Emerson through Stevens. More important, however, is Ashbery's isolation. "Litany" is against transcendence as much as against the real; and its stylistic mannerisms and inconclusiveness, continued from Ashbery's earlier poetry, are equally "against interpretation." "Litany" is against transcendence in two parallel columns, speak to us, to themselves, but never quite to each other. A first reading of "Litany" reveals little, since it is a poem about how only by saying the same thing over and over can one gain an understanding of the conditions of temporal existence.

For a poet of his stature, Ashbery has had more than his share of epiphanies. The ten essays in David Lehman's *Beyond Amaze: New Essays on John Ashbery* mark a new stage in Ashbery's growing acceptability. Productively differing in their critical terminology, the essays share an attitude of homage, which must partly be due to their all having been commissioned for this volume. Most are about Ashbery "as" something: as influenced, as iconoclast, as dream narrator, as theatrical prophet or as dismantler of "theory's discourse". This last argument, by Keith Cohen, is based on Ashbery's foisting of unexamined realism; it ignores the fact that Ashbery is also a great collaborator of bourgeois settings. Few of the essays attempt the complex task of interpreting Ashbery: only David Rigsbee's essay on "These Lacustrine Cities" succeeds in going against the grain of his work in this way.

Ashbery's "difficulty" arises partly, but not wholly, from the fact that his work doesn't fit into any of the received chronologies of twentieth-century American poetry, whether these be Eliot modernism followed by Confessional, rejection, Pound, Williams Imagism leading to Beats and Neo-Imagists, or the one-man tradition of Stevens. This is because Ashbery is a poet of the avant-garde, not a "post-modernist". He takes his concept of artistic responsibility from the tradition of the new, which has dominated Western art since Cézanne: the avant-garde subject is in order to live, breaking traditional forms, a perpetual "for knowledge". This

avant-gardism preceded literary modernism and has survived it.

Modern art was the first and most powerful influence on Ashbery. As he has remarked several times, when he began to write in the 1950s, American poetry was constrained and formal while American abstract-expressionist art was vigorously taking over the heroic responsibilities of the European avant-garde. Any analogies between Ashbery's poetry and abstract expressionism depend, however, upon Ashbery's identification with both the critical viewer and the artist. In *The Rhetoric of the Contemporary Lyric*, Jonathan Holden is happy to tell us that Ashbery "possessed the skill to produce a first-rate 'abstract-expressionist' poetry as evocative and sturdy as the paintings of Willem de Kooning". Holden's essay is a valuable acknowledgment of de Kooning's current role as cultural totem for genius, but it says little about Ashbery, who for reasons of literary history has always scrupulously avoided any appearance of abstract expressionist-type heroism: there is, for Ashbery, no dramatic encounter with the page. In any case, if a direct poet-artist comparison must be made, Giorgio Cavallon would come closer to Ashbery than de Kooning.

Ashbery's decades of practice as an art critic have given his poetry a consistent awareness of the multiple acts of transformation (or "speculation") in Ashbery's sense of mirroring) that are involved in using language to write about things seen. Even before Cézanne, the two-dimensional picture plane was always partly "about" illusion. Parmigianino, Ingres, Picasso, and de Kooning, Ashbery's favourite artists, all stressed this illusion-making process. The "painting-poem" that Ashbery projects in his anti-Horatian address to his muse, "And *Ut Pictura Poetis* is her Name", comes as painting is often said to come from an "almost empty mind/colliding with the lush, Rousseau-like foliage of its desire to communicate". Ashbery's gesture towards the reader is consistent; it is only the motifs of subject matter that change alarmingly. Fred Moten remarks in his essay in Lehman's collection on *Some Trees*, that when Ashbery did finally take on a literary influence it was the dissociative surrealism of Raymond Roussel. Ashbery's collections since *Some Trees* can be seen as a gingerly and still incomplete approach to literariness. "Litany" is full of allusive assonances, bent echoes of other poets whose situations Ashbery uses without permitting the verbal echo to evoke an entire literary tradition.

In his interview with Polish poet Flor Sommer in the May 1981 issue of *Quorum*, Ashbery remarks that no one now thinks it odd that Picasso painted faces with eyes and mouth in the wrong place, while the hold of realism in literature is such that the same kind of image in a poem would still be considered shocking. Subject matter, Ashbery implies, should be as irrelevant to the present-day poet as it is to a Cézanne still-life. The real is of strictly historical interest.

Like one of Miller's "Cleaners" extracting

Russian Collage

That year I took Autumn as a friend
nostalgia was in my house.
Yet when I reached you from Vladivostok
on the telephone,
I was so late I knock at you, I knock,
I try to wake you,
and this was only a wound
with a little cloud of torture over it.

Meanwhile and also, I submit
to the blackmail of circumstance,
in broadrimmed hats and long overcoats,
with whole notebooks of poems,
long hair, you crumbled to ashes
like leafless, thin branches.
That year I took Autumn as my friend.

Julie Whitty

This or that from the vulgar stibble,
with the roistering
Of harvesters long extinct, dead for the
war...

When what Stevens called "the vulgar of experience" appears in "Litany", it is less a common language than a pile of virtually interpretation-proof images. Stevens searched for a suitably impoverished "plain sense of things" in his later poetry, but for Ashbery's speaker this is a Casey-at-the-bat sort of earnestness, "too old-hat", while its apparent alternative is idiot Black Mountain oversimplification of experience: "Enjoy/You as you are/The pleasant taste of you". With vernacular irony Ashbery calls this cross between Robert Creeley and E. J. Thibb "a class act/That doesn't look like a class act..."

"Litany" is a long poem - three thousand lines - that needs its length. Like romance, it depends for its effect upon almost infinitely extendable emblematic incidents taking place on the same plane. As part of his landscape of time passing, one of Ashbery's speakers even sees Langland's "fair field full of folk", who are among the few other people in the poem. "Litany's" three sections are structured in twenty-to-forty-line unfurlings of some premise, anecdote, or style of diction. A "source" or "origin of the present" typically descends to "sidewalk shrubbery" where it can "become itself" with mixed results. In *Five Temperaments*, David Kalstone called this habit of mind Ashbery's "myth of diminution". Each unfurling section acts as a miniature of "Litany's" broad premise that we live to repeated cycles of false discovery, but cumulatively they convey a happier theme of evolution by repetition. In the companion poem "Late Echo" this theme is made explicit:

Alone with our madoes and favorite
flower
We see that there really is nothing left
to write about,
Or rather, it is necessary to write about
the same old things
in the same way, repeating the same
things over and over
For love to continue and be gradually
different.

When "fatality" announces the beginnings of the Age of Brass halfway through "Litany", Ashbery provides his poem with an Ovidian myth. As David Bromwich has argued persuasively, "Litany" depicts the middle two ages of man in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In the left-hand column, Brass is the voice of our ahistorical present, condemned to repetitious cycles. In the right-hand column, the more obviously poetic Silver is at home with time and tradition, but is fatally desperate for love. Although the voice later identified as Silver initially attracts sympathy, it is also at times that of a Victorian collector and nostalgia artist. Meanwhile Brass struggles through the "sunkent Parnassus" of the busily empty everyday. The voices change diction and reverse attitudes. (It is Brass who remembers the "radiant presence" of the disappeared god, and it is Silver who beautifully evokes the fashionable quiddity of the Yellow River, flowing even without anyone to see it. These mythological characterizations are no more than general

guides; their overlap shows that the same patterns of experience will eventually turn up even in different minds. While Brass literally has the last word, "Litany" doesn't end with an Age of Brass taking over from an Age of Silver. Throughout, Ashbery's parallel columns have been suggesting that at any point two voices are better than one. When I heard Ashbery and Ann Lauterbach recite "Litany" in January 1980 in New York, their voices combined to create a powerful musical flow, with the single-voice sections acting as meditative "notes". Recited unironically, "Litany" had a plangency which the printed version does not quite convey.

In "Litany's" second section, Ashbery crisply addresses himself to the reader who has been looking for the poem's meaning. The Brass voice remarks aply of the preceding evocation of disappearing gods: "Honey, it's all Greek to me, I...". This speaker isn't given a chance to expound his down-to-earth views, however, since a pedantic, Victorian voice announces that he should

... soon again be the same man as
before --
Meaning: the same man when I heard
cheerful talk,
The same grief, the same deep and
prolonged meditation,
And almost the same feisty and
apoplectic.

This passage is "just to make sure" we get the point that the more we reason out our progress, the less likely we are to change life or find happiness. Ashbery's patterns of repeated rage, discovery, and disarming self-knowledge do not boil down to an "it"; the point we need to "get" is the pattern of discovery and descent.

Even though "Litany" and the shorter lyrics of *As We Know* are littered with anecdotal detail, we are never, as with Robert Lowell, encouraged to believe we have the "real" John Ashbery. An Ashbery poem may change from "I" to "he" to "we" to "you" without warning, and even "I" as in Stevens's late poetry - often has no discernible referent. One benefit of this confounding of pronouns is that the poems do not require readers ("you") to feel sympathetic towards the author ("me"). Other recent solutions to the problem of the speaker have been less happy. What Jonathan Holden in *The Rhetoric of the Contemporary Lyric* nicely terms "the abuse of the second-person pronoun" is the easy way out by which the American poet addresses a semi-private "you". Retaining an intimate and urgent tone, [the poet] can seem also to speak for the entire human race". John Koethe's essay in Lehman's collection, "The Metaphysical Subject in John Ashbery", must be essential reading for anyone concerned with the evolution of the speaker in modern poetry. Koethe sees Ashbery's speaker as a profoundly anti-Cartesian "subject" which is neither ego nor body but a self that inhabits a "durationalness", now, approaching and withdrawing from the notion of physical life to real time. Koethe implicitly offers a way of seeing modern poetry as before and after the impact of linguistic philosophy, linking flight from the Cartesian ego to the recognition of language as construct.

Koethe correctly sees Ashbery's abstracted "subject" as "on the one hand, a 'subject' in the voices in 'Litany' (as expressed in the poem's address to 'Valentine', 'I need you'). Underneath the pragmatism and the poetics, each speaker wants a perfect lover to 'take care of me'; he needs some Freudian Other, whether it is the lover, the reader, or the landscape. In 'Litany' landscape seems to be the most poignantly desired love-object, infinitely responsive but uncontrollable, partly invented by our need for it. Every landscape is in part the product of our awesome repository of shape-making devices - paintings, photographs, postcards, diaries, emblems, tapes, windows, translated texts. It is also a shadow, a replica and a counterforce. The most terrifying perception in 'Litany' are the gaps or lack in the landscape and 'The vision of a cold, cold, cold'.

In "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" Wallace Stevens declared that "The death of one god is the death of all". Ashbery, in the next generation, posits a poetic world in which transcendent metaphor is dead. "Litany" is crowded with images and similes, but almost empty of symbols. In his deadly essay (in Lehman's collection) on Ashbery's rhetoric, Douglas Crase remarks most suggestively that many of Ashbery's rhetorical figures are shared with the Longian sublime: both create awe by defeating expectations. We never know what is coming next and even our expectation of closure is defeated. Ashbery's metaphors, like Ovid's, show why experience like way it is, but Ashbery's changes are in grown or incomplete. Ashbery's Narcissus is blind, like Eros; he can get to the fatal pool but it is "muted" because he can't see to complete his transformation and take on the mythic robes of self-regarding poet.

In a 1970 essay on Saul Steinberg, Ashbery coined the term "calligraphy" to describe the "ambiguously whole record of experience" in Steinberg's philosophical cartoons. Ashbery's intense argument for a mixed art like Steinberg's ship describes his own ambitions:

Why shouldn't painting tell a story, or not tell it, as it sees fit? Why should poetry be intellectual and non-sensory, or the reverse? Our eyes, minds, and feelings do not enter in isolated compartments but are part of each other, constantly cutting, consulting and reinforcing each other. No art constructed according to the above canons, or any others, will win away sleep, leaving left one or more of the faculties of account. It will eventually lose the attention of the others.

Ashbery's poetry is truly difficult because he wants his long calligraphies to contain everything. Literary traditions constrain this inclusive ambition, then he will find apparently non-literary ways of telling his stories.

Since the story of Ashbery's reputation holds a convex mirror to the state of American criticism in the 1960s and 1970s, Lehman's reverent collection needs a companion volume of essays, still uncollected essays, including the attacks by John Simon, Robert Blyers and Charles Molesworth, and applied praise and analysis by (among others) Frank O'Hara, Richard Howard, Harold Bloom, David Kalstone and two of Lehman's contributors, Marjorie Perloff and Fred Moten. In earlier essays, "Meanwhile Jonathan Holden's *The Rhetoric of the Contemporary Lyric* is very much a book of the present critical moment. Holden shows a fraternal interest in his fellow young American poets, giving an insider's view of controversies in American literary magazines in the late 1970s. Critic Stanley Plumly and A. Poulin, Jr. are politely deferred to, while poets such as Sandra McPherson (whom he underestimates), Philip Booth, Stephen Dunn and others are ranked and occasionally ticked off for mistakes.

One of the features of *The Rhetoric of the Contemporary Lyric* is Holden's workshop-type rewriting of various poems with person, tense or vocabulary changed. Though this pleasantly pedagogic technique is unfortunately passed off as linguistic analysis, Holden's rewrites can be devised to serve a deeper purpose. Take a well-known passage and change its vocabulary; perhaps to the style of another writer, or to a different genre. Then ask: retaining the original author and the "view" one has of the original, what is the effect? It's a game closer to spirit to John Cage than to Ashbery, but it has rewards.

Poems and features by John Arden, Richard Adams, Ivor Cutler, Adrian Henri, Roger McGough, Brian Patten, Tom Raworth, Heathcote Williams, and others are included in the issue of *Clap at the Crack of Doom*, issue of *New Departure*, No 15, available from Predmont, Bisleigh, Stroud, Glos GL8 7BU at £1.00 plus p.p.s.

Poetry of inclusion

By Douglas Dunn

LOUIS SIMPSON:
Cavaliere at the Funeral
89pp. Oxford University Press. £4.50.
0 19 211945 5

In the late 1950s, Louis Simpson - like the late James Wright - dismantled the mastery verse technique of his previous writing to follow a more self-consciously American mode, one in which metre seems to have been abandoned as wicked. Readers who had been impressed by Simpson's (and Wright's) metrical accomplishments must have thought their new methodology a bit disabbling, a poet's peevish play - so sooner do you get to like their work than they change it. In retrospect, it looks as if a fresh and critical experience of the impact of American materialism was the most important factor in forming the important literary group that was to be seen then in Robert Bly's magazine (*The Fifties and The Sixties*).

This is Simpson's "Americano Poetry" (from his *Selected Poems*):
Whatever it is, it must have
A stomach that can digest
Rubber, coal, uranium, moose,
poems.
Like the shark, it contains a shoe.
It must swim for miles through the
desert
Uttering cries that are almost
human.

A poetry capable of leaving nothing out, a digestive poetry, it dispensed abstract language at the same time as it gave the impression of looking, to a state of strenuous happenstance, for named and concrete things to include.

In his enjoyable new collection, *Cavaliere at the Funeral*, Simpson writes in "The Man She Loved" of a young writer in a family that is a little strange to him, "talking Yiddish". To their simple, affectionate questions, Simpson writes,

He returned simple answers.
For how could he explain what it
meant to be a writer...

aword that was entirely different, and yet it would include the sofa and the smell of chicken cooking. An idea of "including" has been apparent in Simpson's poetry for some time. But although the range of experience from which he draws is a wide one - Jamaican childhood, a re-imagined

Russia that was his mother's birthplace, Jewish families in Brooklyn, military service, post-War Paris, Australia, which gets a sequence in the new book) - these sources are reinterpreted as often as his idea of inclusiveness is suggested. "The smell of chicken cooking" returns the reader to a poem of two decades ago, "A Story about Chicken Soup", as surely as the taste of the madeleine, that hint in the senses which can be anything and can come from anywhere.

"The Man She Loved" is like most of the poems in *Cavaliere at the Funeral* in that it is a story and proud of it. Most of the poems are shaped, it seems to me, by the notional form of stories. Chekhov appears to the Simpson's persistent standard of story-telling, which is as it should be. The book's title and the title poem come from Chekhov's story "In the Ravine" - "This was the village where the deacon ate all the caviare at the funeral". What we get in the poem, though, has little to do with Chekhov's gloomily evoked industrial village, but another story.

"Chocolates" is an amusing account of an incident from Chekhov's life. But the Chekhovian atmosphere on which Simpson's imagination seem to thrive is peculiarly adaptable to American settings. His story-telling also reminded me of a remark made by one of Chekhov's characters - "Keep it short and skip the psychology". Any fool can be brief, but to skip the psychology is an achievement for an American poet. In poems like "Sway", for example, or "Basic Blues" and "A Bower of Roses" (both about the 1940s), or "American Classic" (a Hopperesque roadside scene), Simpson effortlessly avoids psychological intrusions: he simply tells us what it was like, what happened or didn't happen, and who said what. Significances are evoked rather than moralized into grand finales. "A Bower of Roses" ends with an American soldier visiting an affectionate French whore. He lies beside her thinking about the young women he knew in America and who would not let you do anything. He thinks about a song of the Great War, "How Are You Going to Keep Them Down On The Farm" (After They've Seen Paris). The poem ends:

He supposed that this was what
life taught you
that words you thought were a
joke,
and applied to someone else,
were real, and applied to you.

These things make an unforgettable impression, as though there were a reason for being here, in one place rather than another.

The potency of cheap music, as it was said elsewhere, in another story. In several of Simpson's poems the riles of popular songs crop up as if to prove that they are implicated in how we live and feel. And they are; or in Simpson's poems they are.

A possible problem with story-telling in free verse is that it makes for a quiet poetry, one in which language is disturbingly close to prose in both rhythm and the distribution of images and figures of speech. Simpson seems to have forbidden himself cadences which would not be permitted to a narrator in a prose short story. Personally, I don't think it matters: interesting stories solicit my gratitude, and the questions one is at first tempted to ask - "Is this verse? Is this poetry, or is it prose?" - are about as important as "Is this a true story?"

In his overtly American stories, Simpson is predisposed towards a sad, gentle satire. He evokes unhappy couples trapped in materialism and the conventions of society. "The Beaded Pear", "The Ice Cube Maker" (both reminiscent of John Cheever's stories) and "The River Running By" express that banal loneliness which is frequently the subject of short stories. Names of products, titles of movies and TV shows, tenses, sights, sounds and smells, those bits of everything which Simpson in that earlier manifesto poem said American poetry ought to annex: all are drawn in to evoke people in their time and place. It makes his poems tangible and effective, though there is also a touch of arrogant stand-offishness in describing lives palpably not one's own so largely in terms of surrounding paraphernalia. It is not exactly a technique of caricature, or of outline; but something does seem left out.

Even so, Simpson is a gently accepting observer and participant. If he shakes his head with sadness at what his characters get up to, the result is bewilderment, the dawning of wisdom and not finger-wagging; no one ever learned anything without first being confused. As for the effect on memory of people, places, things, overheard events and people hardly known - that vagueness, and interest, outside the circle of one's own intimacy - Simpson has the last and memorable word:

These things make an unforgettable impression, as though there were a reason for being here, in one place rather than another.

Third, and most important, the book reads as though written by a cheerleader. Enthusiasm is a virtue, but it seems to preclude Potter from acknowledging what a bitchy, difficult man the poet was, and to prevent his exploring the way in which Frost's great popular success in some sense removed him from literature and damaged his later work by forcing him to rest in the applause of an audience who never understood him, the situation about which Lionel Tilling made his celebrated speech on Frost's darkness. However, this book should persuade its intended readers to move beyond it and, so doing, achieve a valuable purpose.

The match is, of course, rigged: John Elsom has not only selected reviews of comparatively few plays, but also edited them fairly thoroughly, printing sometimes only snippets or a single sentence; he has ensured that Tynan started favourite by quoting his earliest work from the 1950 edited selection. *He That Plays the Kite*. But in reading these supercharged fragments of prose, each one a virtuoso performance in which the critic has struggled to cram his sensibility and perspicacity into a few pungent sentences, one cannot but respond with excitement. The sense of an elegant and dangerous game is reinforced by the subject-matter - the strains of the last night which is repeatedly invoked, and the unfolding history of a great theatrical change, which is surely a topic worth the enthusiasm Elsom wishes to generate.

Doubts about the anthology relate to its purposes. The intention to "evolve the great occasions in post-war British theatre" for the entertainment of "the general theatre-goer" avowed on the dust-jacket is successfully, if selective-



Part Black, part Cherokee Indian, part Mexican, a gentle innu in private but a musician, wild and sexual in performance, who plucked savagely at his guitar with his teeth as well as his fingers, Jimi Hendrix offended the Daughters of the American Revolution who banned him from a concert tour. This watercolour (1973) by Patrick Watson, painted three years after Hendrix's death, is included in the sale of "Modern British and Irish Paintings, Drawing and Sculpture" to be held on June 12 at Christie's, 8 King St, London SW1.

Scoring ducks

By J. S. Bratton

JOHN ELSOM (Editor):
Post-War British Theatre Criticism
270pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul.
1975.
0 7100 0535 0

Tynan 20, Holman 15, Shulman 2, Trowin 6... It is difficult to avoid setting up a mental scoreboard for the critics quoted in John Elsom's *Post-War British Theatre Criticism*, recording 1 for an interesting observation, 2 for a penetrating insight and 5 for a bullseye, that moment (which the anthology seems to allow to each reviewer in turn) when everyone else missed the point, and one alone guessed what we would all be thinking today. In some rounds the handicapping is obvious, and the score a foregone conclusion, but there are surprises: the *Daily Express* welcomed *Look Back in Anger*; J. C. Trewin noted Pinter's mastery of dialogue at first hearing, in the almost universally condemned 1956 *Birthday Party*. But as enjoyable as the high scores are the ducks, when Ivor Brown despises *The Cockatoo* or Milton Shulman completely misrepresents *Godot*. Of course hardly anybody did well with a snap reaction to Beckett, except Kenneth Tynan, who emerges as a clear winner overall.

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Light on Frost

By Lachlan Mackinnon

JAMES L. POTTER:
Robert Frost Handbook
266pp. Pennsylvania State University Press.
1977.
0 271 02330 1

This book is very well designed as an introduction to Robert Frost aimed at the student and the general reader. Divided into four parts, it offers a biography of sufficient length (forty-two pages) to place the poems in temporal context before they are discussed thematically, a critical treatment of the oeuvre, examination of the most apparent influences (Wordsworth, Emerson, Thoreau) and of Frost's poetic techniques, and an extensive annotated bibliography. All the tools required for initial study of the poetry are thus made available.

The detailed critical section opens by looking at Frost's use of indirectness. His work is next divided up to such a degree as to show two apparently contradictory attitudes: one optimistic and occasionally jesting; the other tragic and sceptical. It then brings together, to disclose Frost's essentially some "variability", James L. Potter has drawn here on Richard Bly's account of Frost's self-perceived limitations, and how these were both limited and made possible his achievement: not clearly in the space

available he cannot dig very deeply. What he says is competent if not strikingly new, and clear enough to stimulate thoughtful qualification.

The discussion of influences is very abbreviated and thus too simple (particularly in the case of Wordsworth) to do more than provoke further inquiry, but this much it should do. The treatment of Frost's poetic techniques is short but sensible, relating his practice of metaphor to his conception of himself as a synecdochist and pointing towards his prosodic variety.

Some misgivings remain. For instance, trivially but unsettlingly, Frost is said to have made Bridges's acquaintance to 1914 (p.17), but not until 1928 (p.28). Second, there is an extraordinary moment at which Frost is reproved for allowing "Design" to remain unmy-

In the Poem

To bring the picture the well the wind
The flower the glass the shine on wood
And the cold clearness of water
To the clean aware world of the poem

To save from death decay and ruin
The sacred moment of vision and surprise
And keep in the real world
The real gesture of a hand touching the table.

Sophia de Mello Breyner

Translated by Ruth Prynne

The life-expectancy of art

By David Piper

ROBERT M. ADAMS:
The Lost Museum
Olimpuses of Vanished Originals
255pp. New York, Viking, \$25.
0 670 44107 4

The subtitle of *The Lost Museum*, "Olimpuses of Vanished Originals", is a necessary qualification. Robert Adams offers us an anthology of lost works of art, helping "by putting forward this sampler of what has not survived, or has survived only at second hand, to make evident how much richer and more various the past really was than we can know simply by looking at its authenticated remains". After an introduction that touches on some of the ways in which works of art may disappear, his collection proceeds chronologically, in sections on Ancient Civilizations, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Making and Breaking of Collections; World War II. A section on "Freaks and Follies of Survival" recapitulates and expands on some themes broached earlier, and the conclusion again lingers, with examples, on the vulnerability of the works of man and the inevitability of final nuclear or cosmic doom. Meanwhile, Professor Adams invites us to take some comfort from observing "how much can be regained from the past". Part of his peroration may sound a bit run out of context ("Whole museums and entire libraries have been lost, but they only add to the wealth of the lost museum..."), but we can jolt the author in a melancholy salute, brooding on the old comment, on Rome: "Quinta fuit ipse ruina docti".

Adams is not concerned with ruins, however, which are more or less survivors, but with things lost and known now only by copies, or by preliminary studies, or ghosts of originals transformed into something quite different. His *Lost Museum* is an extension to that immeasurable edifice suggested by André Malraux of the Imaginary Museum, or Museum without Walls—the shelveable collection of reproductions of works of art, available to any interested student in a library, or his own study. This extension may indeed be more acceptable as an idea than Malraux's, for in Adams's collection the copies that his reproductions are not substitutes for original objects

which still exist, but the only records of what these objects once were, and thus in a sense they are "real things" in themselves.

The substance of the book consists of reproductions, 215 in all, mostly well produced in black and white. It is, in short, basically a scissors-and-paste job, in fact reflected in the layout, which makes the narrative a very bumpy ride, the flow of thought being constantly interrupted not only by the illustrations but by captions of sometimes considerable length that would have been more comfortably digested into the main text. And in the text, cross-references are not given to the illustrations, which, in turn, do not always coincide on the same spread with the mention of them in the text. Locations of objects reproduced are not always given.

Presumably most people likely to read the book will know that Gérôme's masterpiece "The Raft of the Medusa" is to be found in the Louvre, but though Adams reproduces an old photograph of it I could not find any reference to where the painting itself is to be found. The photograph makes his point, though—that fealty technique and materials used can lead eventually to the irreversible destruction of the art-object. The photograph makes visible details that I do not remember being able to discern on a recent visit to the Louvre, in the ever more sombre depths of that vast canvas. It is said that the palm is being consumed by the bitumen which Gérôme used—perhaps following the practice of Sir Joshua Reynolds—to endow the darks of his composition with a glowing translucency. On the other hand, the point would have been made more strikingly if a second photograph, of the painting as it is now, had been reproduced alongside the first.

Again, as the love of art becomes ever more widely implanted, there are their numbers: of visitors to museums; hundreds of thousands, even (as in the National Gallery or the British Museum) millions every year. Though I do not subscribe to the view sometimes expressed that pictures get worn out by the incessant mauling from unresponsive eyes, it is indisputable that the floors of the Acropolis or of Canterbury Cathedral are being worn out, as was Stonehenge, which the ordinary visitor cannot now approach within ten feet, or touching—distance. At the Fitzwilliam Museum, in Cambridge, in the first quarter of this cen-

tury, Sir Sydney Cockerell popularized by his example the idea that a great museum could be as agreeable, as welcoming, as domestic almost, as the living rooms of a great country-house. The basis was, of course, a mixed display, and this included rugs on the floor. Cockerell, who was talented in such matters, coaxed out of benefactors, or bought for a few pounds at a time, a great many fine carpets for walking on, but also of a visual quality that would not let down the great paintings on the walls. But as time passed and they became more valuable, the best of them, upgraded to the status of museum objects, had to be removed from the floors and since there was no room to show them elsewhere, withdrawn, rolled up, and stored out of sight.

Deliberate damage is another ever-increasing concern to the harassed museum curator. The greater the steel-billing of a work of art, the more attractive it is to the fanatic. Adams writes, "Like the assassins of presidents, assassins of art wander amongst us, unmarked and unregarded, till the moment when it is too late to mark or regard". Their weapons can be swift beyond possibility of prevention. It took seconds for a knife to shred the National Gallery's Poussin, less for Rembrandt's great "Jacob's Blessing" at Kassel to be sprayed with acid. Adams reproduces the latter, and also that desolating photograph of the "Rokeby Venus" with the gashes of its suffering fresh and gaping. Glazing the pictures, incidentally, is not a conclusive answer. The suffragette Anne Hunt, confronting Milady's portrait of Carlyle behind its glass in the National Portrait Gallery on July 17, 1914, had been closely trailed by the Gallery's Head Attendant, who had noticed her the day before. Yet, though he closed with her almost as soon as the meat cleaver appeared, from under her cloak, he was not quick enough to prevent the shattering of the glass, and Carlyle's scars are still visible in certain lights.

Preventive measures may be decisive in keeping a work of art in existence, but perhaps at the cost of consigning it to what is almost a tomb. The protective barriers that the great print-rooms of the world have erected to prevent the greatest drawings by Old Masters from being handled to death become ever more stringent. It is almost impossible to gain access, for example, to Blake's illuminated books, had indeed—though the friction of touching the original, the relic,

is missing—most people will learn as much from the extraordinary facsimiles produced by the Trinicon Press as from the originals. But of course the Trinicon facsimiles, too, wear out with handling, and are now both hard to come by, and extremely expensive.

Robert Adams quotes examples of a great many modes of destruction: besides time itself, war, theft, censorship, sabotage, restoration, neglect and indifference. Inevitably, World War Two rates a chapter to itself, its ravages all the more poignant because faint reflections survive of a relatively large number of the objects destroyed, in the form of photographs. Thus here we can glimpse the Gozzoli frescoes shelled by the Americans in the Campo Santo at Pisa, the Mantegna's bombed to dust in the Ovetari Chapel; a token sampling of the treasures that went in the fire-storm at Dresden or in the bombing of Berlin (including one of the most melancholy of all losses, the inebriated mysterious "School of Pao" by Signorelli); a fragile drawing by the Swiss Laugher whose laughter was extinguished at Hiroshima.

And the moral? Perhaps to bear ever more urgently in mind Walter de la Mare's injunction to look your last on all things lovely every hour. Since that hour may not only be your last, but that of the loveliness itself.

In a disarming note at the beginning of the book, Adams offers an apology for his autocratic procedure: "No man is or should be a professional student of lost works of art". His own professional field has been English literature. As an avowed amateur in art history, he tends to the sweeping generalization; thus, Queen Christina, emerging briefly as a stage in the provenance of Correggio's "Leda", is qualified gratuitously as "that broody blue-stocking", while Henry VIII is alleged to have spent "most of his last two or three years" fighting "in France". Nevertheless, Adams's knowledge is impressive and his choice of examples vivid, picturesque and cogent. If it is also fairly arbitrary, that is no doubt inevitable—this field, to put it mildly, is wide. A museum of all the art works that have ever been lost is almost as difficult a concept as a physical resurrection of all the hosts of the dead: there isn't room for them.

Adams takes architecture into his scope without hesitation—here are the frail echoes of the rich substance of Nonsuch, and of Château d'Oillon; of Cluny, Cîteaux, and St Augustine at Canterbury, in their prime; of Old

St Paul's; of the Parthenon pinned to its rock by an Islamic miner in 1670; of Pomphili and of the United States Hotel in Saratoga. Sometimes, one can believe that the surviving copy more than replaces the original. I would not swap Seizend's drawing of St Peter's Church in 'S. H. H. togenbusch for the relatively poor fabric of the building itself, destroyed in 1646, fourteen years after Seizend had distilled his meditation on its internal space. Adams notes more than once the paradoxical stamina of such fragile sheets of paper "fluttering down like swirling air currents of time as if on wings", while great buildings—the apparently more durable objects of art they contain, great paintings, sculptures and frescoes—crumble to dust.

Conservation is now a problem which obsesses curators, with these works of art should be protected from destruction, whether due to natural decay, to neglect or to more vivid means. Our techniques of preservation have made great advances since the last war, but it does not follow that the objects preserved are necessarily the more accessible and aesthetically to be seen, or shown to the advantage. Modern extensions to some of our major galleries provide depressing evidence of the difficulty of reconciling the conservation bid given to architects and designers with the needs of the visitor. Light levels are one factor—it is impossible, for example, to see Elizabethan miniatures in their original brilliance in the dusk which is all that the adepts will allow if we are to prevent their fading—or rather, perhaps, to delay their fading. Objects of art, like people, are subject to laws of mortality and have a life expectancy; but we will find an answer to the question: by how much do we demand the life-expectancy of a painting? It raises the light level by five, or a hundred times, or whatever? It is impossible to let the connoisseurs of a thousand years or so hence take their chance ("He who kisses Joy as it flies/Lives in Eternity's sunrise"). It is proportioned galleries, filled to the brim with a dead grey light and lined air motivated by audible howl, under a massive, aggressively imposed lid of layered technology, that to the brief work out by the scientist, but they produce instant melancholia in the visitor.

One of the noteworthy aspects of these events was that they emphasized an approach to book history associated with a group of French historians and generally referred to in English by its French name, *histoire du livre*. The classic text representing this approach is *L'Apparition du Livre*, written by Henri-Jean Martin following the plan of Lucien Febvre and published in 1958 in the great series collectively called "L'Évolution du Humain" (issued in translation as *The Coming of the Book*, 1976, translated by David Gougeon). Febvre's preface makes clear the aim of the work: it is not, he insists, intended to be a history of printing, but rather an examination of the role of the printed book in civilization up to the end of the sixteenth century. Febvre states "we have to establish how and why the book was something more than a thing of technical ingenuity... we are looking to prove that the printed book was one of the most effective means of mastery over the whole world". That goal, he adds, is the "sovereignty" of the work. Although the *sovereignty* of the book is a long tradition of studies in the history of printing and publishing, there is no doubt that it has provided an important stimulus to work that focuses on the "English" subtitle. The work does commend on type, paper, and presswork, but it tries to place them in a social and economic context; and all the details lead towards the final chapter on "The Book as a Force for Change". During the twenty years since this work appeared, a whole school of historians in France has followed its lead, and historians writing in English who have been principally been specialists in French history.

Although studies of publishing, of course, and of the social significance of books in England and elsewhere certainly exist, the pursuit of book history in the English-speaking world has come to be seen as manifestly a distinctly different emphasis from that of the French. There is no question that the study of English Renaissance drama furnished the impetus for the twenty-century developments in the field usually called "analytical bibliography" (that is, the elucidation of the printing history of a book through analysis of the physical evidence of its typography and paper). Nor can it be doubted that the study of the principal products of English bibliographical scholarship—such as the work of the Bibliographical Society, including the *Short-Title Catalogue*—are primarily concerned with books as material objects. It is further true that, whereas *l'histoire du livre* grew in the hands of historians who had no special expertise in the study of the physical book, the English tradition has emerged from the work of literary scholars who were primarily interested in establishing texts and who recognized that a close examination of physical evidence is relevant to that task.

This is the text of the second Hanes Lecture in the History of the Book, which was delivered by G. Thomas Tanselle at the University of North Carolina on April 15, 1981. The lectureship is sponsored by the Hanes Foundation for the Study of the Origin and Development of the Book, established in 1929.

1972 was the Year of the Book (it was UNESCO's International Book Year), both 1979 and 1980 could have been called the Year of the History of the Book. In early 1979 there appeared Elizabeth Eisenstein's *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, examining the influence of printing on the history of "early-modern Europe"; and, six months later, Robert Darnton's *The Business of Enlightenment*, tracing the publishing history of Diderot's *Encyclopédie*. Professor Eisenstein also served, in the early months of the year, as the first resident consultant of the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, and Professor Darnton, in December, was a speaker under the Center's auspices. In June 1980 a conference (sponsored by the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries) was held in Boston on the topic "Books and Society in History"; the speakers, coming from Great Britain, France, and West Germany as well as the United States, issued a joint statement proclaiming, "The history of the book is fundamental to the historical study of society" and calling on scholars, librarians, and foundations "to support activities in the field of the history of the book". And four months later the American Antiquarian Society held a conference called "Printing and Society in Early America", with twenty-nine speakers from four countries. These are but a few of the more prominent manifestations of the fact that the subject of book history has been much in the air in recent months.

One of the noteworthy aspects of these events was that they emphasized an approach to book history associated with a group of French historians and generally referred to in English by its French name, *histoire du livre*. The classic text representing this approach is *L'Apparition du Livre*, written by Henri-Jean Martin following the plan of Lucien Febvre and published in 1958 in the great series collectively called "L'Évolution du Humain" (issued in translation as *The Coming of the Book*, 1976, translated by David Gougeon). Febvre's preface makes clear the aim of the work: it is not, he insists, intended to be a history of printing, but rather an examination of the role of the printed book in civilization up to the end of the sixteenth century. Febvre states "we have to establish how and why the book was something more than a thing of technical ingenuity... we are looking to prove that the printed book was one of the most effective means of mastery over the whole world". That goal, he adds, is the "sovereignty" of the work. Although the *sovereignty* of the book is a long tradition of studies in the history of printing and publishing, there is no doubt that it has provided an important stimulus to work that focuses on the "English" subtitle. The work does commend on type, paper, and presswork, but it tries to place them in a social and economic context; and all the details lead towards the final chapter on "The Book as a Force for Change". During the twenty years since this work appeared, a whole school of historians in France has followed its lead, and historians writing in English who have been principally been specialists in French history.

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From bibliography to *histoire totale*: the history of books as a field of study

By G. Thomas Tanselle

There is no question that the study of English Renaissance drama furnished the impetus for the twenty-century developments in the field usually called "analytical bibliography" (that is, the elucidation of the printing history of a book through analysis of the physical evidence of its typography and paper). Nor can it be doubted that the study of the principal products of English bibliographical scholarship—such as the work of the Bibliographical Society, including the *Short-Title Catalogue*—are primarily concerned with books as material objects. It is further true that, whereas *l'histoire du livre* grew in the hands of historians who had no special expertise in the study of the physical book, the English tradition has emerged from the work of literary scholars who were primarily interested in establishing texts and who recognized that a close examination of physical evidence is relevant to that task.

One of the unfortunate results of this split is that many people believe analytical bibliography to be simply a tool of literary and textual study, a technique with no direct bearing on the enterprises of historians. An indication of the size of this gap, and the difficulty of communication across it, is afforded by some of the introductory remarks in Darnton's book. Because I very much admire what Darnton accomplishes in the body of his book and because he demonstrates there an understanding of the connections between these two approaches, I feel free to seize on certain ill-considered remarks that appear in his opening paragraphs. After describing *l'histoire du livre*, he claims that the subject "hardly exists in the United States today". Book history in America, he says, "has been relegated to library schools and rare book rooms". "Step into any rare book room," he continues, "and you will find aficionados savoring bindings, epilogues contemplating watermarks, erudits preparing editions of Jane Austen; but you will not run across any ordinary, meat-and-potatoes historian attempting to understand the book as a force in history."

That so probing and perceptive a historian as Darnton could utter these words is, in the most telling measure, one could imagine, the distance that has grown up between two approaches that ought to be regarded as mutually supportive. The attempted contrast between a rough-and-ready concern with basic historical questions and a rather effete and dilettantish preoccupation with the aesthetics of bookmaking is of course based on hackneyed stereotypes that have no validity. Darnton is a sophisticated scholar, not a meat-and-potatoes historian, and he would not reject an overly precious study of paper and bindings if he recognized in it a direct bearing on the central concerns of intellectual history.

He does proceed to show some awareness of these connections, but in a curiously tentative way. First he urges "generalist" historians to learn from those he calls "specialists" in the "treasure houses of books" and to "tap the vein of information" in their "methodical" bibliographical journals. The advice is sound, but it is couched in terms that undercut it, suggesting that physical bibliography is a remote specialty that can be "tapped" by historians, rather than a fully-fledged branch of history itself. He continues along this line by asserting that the bibliographers "seem to be written by bibliographers for bibliographers" and that in them "it can be difficult to see issues of substance beneath the esoteric language and the antiquarianism". I would be the last to defend the quality of the prose in bibliographical journals, and it would not be profitable to debate whether bibliography has developed more, or less, jargon than other fields. But to call bibliographical writing "antiquarian" rather than "historical" is to confess a failure to see in it any relevance to other historical investigation. (The use of "antiquarianism" as a pejorative term is in fact a practice that historians might be expected to reject, since all historical data, however small they seem, play their role as evidence underlying larger generalizations. In this respect Darnton's view of bibliography offers one example of a broader issue of historical methodology.) Darnton's divided attitude is evident in his concluding remarks about bibliography:

wonderfully detailed investigation of an important episode of publishing history, and these few strictures of his opening pages do not stand in the way of one's admittance for a great deal. But they do point to a serious problem that must be faced by scholars of book history. The problem is not so much the existence of numerous specialties and the inevitable difficulty of communication that ensues. The real matter for concern is the nature of the gap that has developed between what have come to be called



This page from one of two bound volumes of *L'Art et l'Idée*, on illustrated periodical on "le dilettantisme littéraire et la curiosité", published by Octave Uzanne, Paris (1892), is reproduced in current catalogue from J. L. Beijers, Utrecht. Auctions of mainly Dutch and Flemish antiquarian books, including two copies of the rare *Deus-Aet Bible* will be held at J. L. Beijers, Achter Sint Pieter 14, Utrecht, on June 23 and 24.

But bibliography need not be confined to problems such as how consistently compositor B misspelled the text of *The Merchant of Venice* or whether the patterns of skeleton format reveal regularity in compositor practices. Bibliography leads directly into the hurry-burry of working-class history. It provides one of the few means of analyzing the work habits of skilled artisans before the Industrial Revolution.

Compositor analysis has become a favourite target of the critic of bibliography. But to imply its triviality in methodical, the bibliographical journals. The advice is sound, but it is couched in terms that undercut it, suggesting that physical bibliography is a remote specialty that can be "tapped" by historians, rather than a fully-fledged branch of history itself. He continues along this line by asserting that the bibliographers "seem to be written by bibliographers for bibliographers" and that in them "it can be difficult to see issues of substance beneath the esoteric language and the antiquarianism". I would be the last to defend the quality of the prose in bibliographical journals, and it would not be profitable to debate whether bibliography has developed more, or less, jargon than other fields. But to call bibliographical writing "antiquarian" rather than "historical" is to confess a failure to see in it any relevance to other historical investigation. (The use of "antiquarianism" as a pejorative term is in fact a practice that historians might be expected to reject, since all historical data, however small they seem, play their role as evidence underlying larger generalizations. In this respect Darnton's view of bibliography offers one example of a broader issue of historical methodology.) Darnton's divided attitude is evident in his concluding remarks about bibliography:

The remainder of his study is a

ference itself, are further signs that a move toward an international joining of forces is gaining momentum. In attempting to define the new cooperation, I should like to emphasize that it does not mean simply "fusing" or "blending" two different pursuits or specialties to produce a new synthesis or a new insight. Linking *l'histoire du livre* and English analytical and historical bibliography is not analogous to joining psychology with sociology or economics with geography. It is not a pulling together of separate disciplines; rather, by the very nature of their subject each is inherently a part of the other, and any separation of them is artificial and lessens the validity of their conclusions. The two are logically one. All scholars of the history of books, whether of the French or of the Anglo-American school, are historians. Analytical and descriptive bibliography is history; those who analyze compositional spelling or sort out the impressions and issues of an author's books or describe the typography and paper of particular impressions are attempting to set the historical record straight. The voluminous literature of analytical bibliography and the many deceptive bibliographies covering particular authors, imprints, and genres all form a part of book history. Furthermore, since books are physical objects, any study of the history of books, even when it focuses on the ideas disseminated through them, cannot ignore the physical aspects of books and the effects they have had on the works being transmitted. Darnton asserts that the French have done the most to bring the history of books "into the broad pot of *histoire totale*". Yet it must be said that book history cannot contribute effectively and reliably to that grand historical picture if it is not itself whole, and perhaps we should first think of *histoire totale* du livre. The call for international cooperation, therefore, has a particular urgency in this field. It goes beyond the desire to exchange information based on the study of different materials, though that is of course present. The crucial motivation is methodological, a recognition of the inseparability of the approaches that have become associated with different countries. Whether it is fair to characterize those countries' contributions in this way is another question, and not one I wish to pursue at the moment. For as long as people think of these two emphases as distinct scholarly fields, we have cause for concern, because they cannot be thinking very carefully about the fundamental nature of their subject.

I should like, therefore, to comment on the basic coherence of the field of book history, on the way in which its constituent parts are inextricably bound together. We could begin anywhere, since each aspect leads directly to the others, but I think the question of texts is a useful point of entry. Scholarly editing and the establishment of texts form a natural meeting place between the examination of books as physical objects and the historical analysis of the role of books in society. When John Feather, in his *Bibliographical Society* paper, says, "It is very unfortunate that the world of bibliography has been swamped by textual scholarship," he is being, I think, somewhat unfair. Not that he questions the value of the textual work accomplished; his point is that an "obsession with textual criticism" has "led to the neglect of other fields". Some difficulty has indeed been caused by what is often perceived as the identification of physical bibliography with editing, but I would state the problem somewhat differently. Analytical bibliography has developed in the hands of literary scholars—particularly scholars of Elizabethan drama—and their primary interest in analyzing physical evidence has been the role it could play in the determination of the relative authority of variant readings in texts. After all, McKerrow's seminal book, *An Introduction to Bibliography* (1927), like the 1913 work out of which it grew, was written for

Images of solitude

By Andrew Lincoln

DAVID V. ERDMAN, JOHN E. GRANT, EDWARD J. ROSE, MICHAEL J. TOLLEY (Editors)

William Blake's Designs for Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*
A Complete Edition

Two volumes. Oxford University Press, £150.
0 19 817312 1

About a quarter of Blake's surviving pictorial work resulted from a single commission to illustrate Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*. Blake produced no fewer than 537 watercolour designs for a de luxe edition of the poem, and at least forty-three designs were engraved before the project was abandoned. Ironically, the enormous size of the project has prevented it from becoming, as we know, as Blake's smaller series of illustrations. The engravings are already generally available in book form, and the watercolour designs on film, but now for the first time both parts of the project have been reproduced together, in a reasonably compact edition. The two volumes include monochrome plates of all the watercolour designs, and of the en-

gravings, with variant proofs. Some title pages from coloured versions of the engraved edition, and seventy-eight of the watercolour designs, are also printed in colour. The edition allows the entire series to be studied with relative ease, but one wonders how many individuals, or libraries, will be ready and able to meet its formidable price.

The major theme of Young's poem is death, judgment, redemption—was congenial to Blake, but the nine books (or "Nights") offered no subline to visualize or reinterpret, and Blake's illustrations to Young lack the sustained critical focus of his illustrations to Milton or Dante. *Night Thoughts* has little narrative, and although Young illustrates his themes with a profusion of visual images, only 200 occasions are single images, developed into important focal points for his thought. This presents a serious challenge to the illustrators' integrity. In a characteristic passage in "Night the Fifth", for example, where Young celebrates Night as the friend of Contemplation (lines 181-207), he develops his theme through a loose series of images, from the pictures of the "fame'd Athenian" labouring in silence beneath the stars to two philosophy from heaven. Next, moving from historical example to general statement, he describes the soul which, sitting in

council, "sees, not feels/Tumultuous Life; and reasons with the Storm". Finally he returns inexorably to his own solitude: "In Darkness I'm embower'd/Delighted! Gloom! the clustering Thoughts around/Spontaneous rise, and blossom in the Shade". The illustrator must choose one of these subjects, but which is the most promising? The Athenian philosopher seems the easiest to visualize, the soul sitting in council suggests the central theme, while both images are clearly intended to sanction the final accolade of the poem's solitude. Blake chose the final metaphor, with its blossoming thought. His design (172) above a vine arching over an island of cloud in a starry sky. The poet sits in the cloud looking without delight at a meagre sprig of grapes on the vine above him, ignoring the full bunch he holds in his hand. The design seems to irradiate, with some irony, the passage as a whole; the bundle of unopened grapes leads us to think twice about the soul which "sees, not feels" and so about the Athenian whose philosophy is the product of such limited perception. No doubt an account of Blake's attitude to Young here could be elaborated by referring to the views Blake expressed elsewhere about "cold floods of abstraction and... images of coldness", but explicit statements about Blake's attitude to the design itself are scarce.

Blake's ability to illuminate a complex of ideas with a single concentrated image made him particularly well qualified to illustrate a discursive poet like Young, but he often had to produce illustrations for phrases which offered very little to work on, and the quality of the designs varies considerably. Some seem quite perfunctory, while some provide unimpeachable proof that the sublime and the ridiculous are close neighbours. However, there are some magnificent compositions; and a wealth of daring ideas. When Blake's imagination takes fire, as it does rather more often to the later Nights, the designs have an extraordinary beauty. In design 463, for example, which shows the "Manuscript of Heav'n"/"The Parchment-Scroll" shrunk up by "Flames", the unblinded sweep of Blake's scroll, which writhes amid blazing stars and tumbling bodies, presents a dazzling contrast to the meagre decorum of Young's verse.

Much of the effect of Blake's designs depends on the colouring. The bold outlines are often offset by delicately blended washes, or given depth by subtle shading. Some designs which have a haunting power in watercolour become flat and rather awkward when translated into the monochrome of the printed edition. Some paintings, for example 195, which show a harper kneeling

amid golden fields of light—just virtually unengraved. If the paintings did not always lend themselves to the process of engraving, it has to be said that they do not lend themselves readily to reproduction in monochrome either. The monochrome plates in this edition are pale shadows of the originals; losing both depth and definition. Unfortunately the colour plates are also rather dull. Many have an ochreous or bluish tinge, which tends to flatten the total contrast. They do give some idea of the richness of Blake's colouring, but fail to capture the radiance of the originals.

The introduction to these two volumes includes a history of Blake's project, a detailed account of the evolution of the designs, a new series of comprehensive bibliography. Some of the variant proofs seem to have been given to the fact that the designs have been reduced by a quarter of their original size; but otherwise the bibliography is meticulous and unobtrusive. A full commentary, elucidating the designs, is in preparation. In the meantime, readers who are lucky enough to have access to the edition will find ample food for thought in the designs themselves.

"literary students" and set forth the view—still not sufficiently understood—that textual variants or anomalies in printed books can often be explained by a knowledge of the procedures employed in the production of those books. The example set by most analytical bibliographers thus far, and even direct statements made by several of them, has fostered the notion that analytical bibliography is primarily, or solely, a tool of editing and of literary study. The truth is, of course, that any facts uncovered by bibliographical analysis are historical facts, facts of interest in their own right as the data out of which the broader history of printing and publishing is built. Analytical bibliography is unquestionably a valuable tool for editors to use, but its value exists apart from any assistance it offers to editors: it is well worth applying to any book, whether or not one expects to edit the text contained in the book. But its nearly exclusive association with the editing of literary works by scholars in English departments has meant that historians, scholars of other modern literatures, and members of other departments—such as philosophy or the history of science—have not had adequate opportunities for becoming sufficiently acquainted with it to recognize that it is of equal relevance for their fields.

All books, regardless of their intellectual content, are specimens of printing, deserving of bibliographical analysis for what it may disclose about the printing and publishing practices of the time. The books most revealing in this respect cannot unfortunately be expected always to coincide with those containing the texts most worth reading; but what is learned from such books of course forms part of the background one brings to the examination of the more celebrated books. Similarly, the texts of all books are liable to alteration—both inadvertent and intended—in the processes of production, and therefore what any text means may vary according to the edition in which one encounters it. The fact that scholars of ancient and modern literatures have historically given more attention than scholars in other fields to editorial problems and the establishment of texts has deluded some people into believing that the nature of "literary" communication somehow demands closer examination of textual nuances—and therefore texts more reliable. In every detail—than other kinds of writing require. It is hard to see how historians or philosophers could claim that their purposes are served by any less meticulous recording of textual variants and editorial alterations than that employed in the fullest editions of literary works. But some of them have in fact taken this view in the past—and not simply those who are careless readers. There is a fairly widespread feeling that historians, philosophers, sociologists—all scholars, in fact, except those whose texts are "literary"—read for content and need not be concerned with niceties of punctuation or other formal features, whereas literary scholars have to take form and manner of expression as well as content into account, and thus require the closer attention be paid to every detail of text. The myopia of this position is astounding and shows a little understanding of the nature of reading and of written communication that one is constantly amazed at. The number of seemingly sophisticated people who believe it, in one form or another, it involves several undeniable notions: that form and content are separable, that one can define where "literature" leaves off and other writing begins, that subtleties of expression and nuances of meaning are limited to letters, that the reasonable way to look at the matter, obviously, is that any serious reader of any text, whatever it is, needs to have available any textual evidence that may have a bearing on understanding the meaning of the text. The issue is not whether minor verbal details and punctuation are significant in certain kinds of writing; the crucial point is that since there is always a possibility of their significance, a reader cannot be satisfied with any text that conceals or obscures such evidence.

Clearly, the scholarly establishment of texts is an activity equally relevant to all fields. And since the physical process of textual transmission affects the meanings of texts, bibliographical

analysis—to uncover the printing history of individual books—is equally relevant to establishing texts in all fields. Recognition of these points has only recently begun to spread in any significant way beyond the field of literature, and they have not yet been sufficiently addressed in any field. Furthermore, this connection between physical detail and intellectual content, between analytical bibliography and textual meaning, has a logical bearing on the study of the role of books in society. For this study must be interested both in book production (the place of the book industry, and its details of operation, in a given society and economy) and in books as disseminators of ideas (the place of book distribution in intellectual history); and because the two are so intertwined, historians of the book must recognize that any pursuit of one will inevitably involve study of the other.

For example, one of the prominent activities associated with *l'histoire du livre* (though by no means associated only with French history) has been the analysis of private library holdings, of booksellers' catalogues or inventories, and of borrowing records from institutional libraries. The object of such study is of course to help establish reading habits, as one clue to understanding the dominant ideas that shaped the thinking of a given time and place. This undertaking is tricky, and some of its pitfalls are well known: the presence of books in private libraries does not mean that they were read; the retention of titles in dealers' or publishers' catalogues over a period of time could be either a sign of popularity or an indication that those works were not selling and that the original stock was still on hand; the extent to which the publishing-bookselling market was responsive to readers' interests has to be assessed before one can talk about individuals' purchases or borrowings as a reflection of "reading tastes"; the influence of some books may have depended more on oral discussion than on the actual purchase or borrowing of the books for reading. A similar difficulty, but one that has been much less recognized, is that one cannot satisfactorily discuss the influence of a work in a particular area and period without knowing the peculiarities of the texts in which that work was being read. When a catalogue simply names an author and title, one must try to establish precisely what edition is being referred to, for it can make a great deal of difference whether people were reading one translation rather than another of a foreign work, for instance, or an abridgement or a children's adaptation rather than the full text. Less extreme variations can also be equally important: in any two editions that supposedly contain the same text, there will probably be differences, and whatever their origin, they may have an effect on how the work is understood and interpreted by readers. Historians are not in a position to criticize a historical figure for misinterpreting a particular work without

checking first to see whether the text that figure used may not in fact support the interpretation. Sometimes there is direct evidence to identify the text, as when a passage is quoted in the course of an essay, a letter, or a diary entry, and the passage can be matched with the text of a particular edition; in other cases there is much less to go on, but the point is that the attempt to identify precise texts, rather than simply the titles of works, and then to ascertain any peculiarities in those texts, must be recognized by historians as a basic responsibility when they are taking up questions of the influence of certain books at certain times.

That people have generally in the past read and quoted from whatever edition of a work came most conveniently to hand does not, unfortunately, distinguish them from general readers, and even the scholars, today, most of whom read the same thing. Many scholars have not paused to recognize what analytical bibliography has been demonstrating for three-quarters of a century about the connection between the physical means of textual transmission and the text itself—and thus the meaning—that gets transmitted; and as a result they have often been content to quote from paperback or anthology reprints without determining whether those texts correspond with the original printing (indeed, without the idea that differences might exist ever entering their minds). The problem is the same, transferred to the present, that historians have to face in dealing with the use of books in the past. If book history is to be concerned—as it rightly should be—with the role of books in spreading ideas, then textual matters are central to it; and the analysis of the physical evidence found in books is, in turn, central to the elucidation of textual questions. Textual study, in other words, provides a direct and inevitable link between analytical bibliography and *l'histoire du livre*.

Book history is also social and economic history, dealing with the operation of the printing and publishing industries, and here, too, there is a direct connection, not always understood, with the analysis of physical evidence. Most histories of printing and publishing firms—and therefore the broader histories based on them—have been constructed from the firms' archives, from business records and correspondence files of the firms themselves and of the persons with whom they dealt. Such manuscript material, when it exists, is unquestionably a rich source. But what use is made of the actual books and other pieces of printed matter produced by these firms? Often they are sought out only to verify their existence for purposes of constructing a comprehensive list of imprints or to be perused as the basis for generalizing about their design and content. Rarely is the physical evidence in them analyzed for any further details: it might provide concerning the operation of the firms in question.

Analysis of the recurrence of identifiable pieces of type, of peculiarities in spelling and punctuation, of press figures, and so on can sometimes reveal information about the number of compositors and presses employed, and their manner of sharing the work, the size of the type supply, the number of copies printed, and the like (all of which reflect economic considerations). Charlton Hinman's detailed analysis of the physical evidence in the Shakespeare first folio—the most elaborate work of analytical bibliography yet performed—is essentially a contribution to the history of Jaggard's printing shop, although the motivation behind it was to uncover evidence relevant to making editorial decisions about the text of Shakespeare's plays. Scarcely any work of this kind has been undertaken except in connection with editorial problems; but our knowledge of the history of printing and publishing practices will suffer until such analysis has been applied to large numbers of books, including those of little interest for their texts. Some doubt has arisen in recent years, stimulated by D. F. McKenzie's searching criticisms, about the validity of the results achieved by analytical bibliography. But the proper interpretation of historical evidence—of any kind—is always a matter of judgment; and while there is little question that some analytical bibliographers have been unwise in their evaluation of evidence, much solid work has also been produced.

In any event, however one judges the success of analytical bibliography in the past, analytical work must continue: the books are there, holding clues to their own history, and we must try to learn all we can from the physical evidence they preserve. They are, after all, the primary evidence for book history, although this obvious fact is often overlooked. When historians write about printing and publishing firms, they are likely to think of the archives of the firms and any other relevant manuscript materials as the primary evidence; and so they are in some respects. But the printed items themselves also provide information about the bookmaking process, and whenever that information conflicts with the archival record, it must take precedence: the actual books constitute the evidence, whereas printers' and publishers' records contain statements about the books. To be sure, both kinds of materials must be used, where they are available, because each is likely to furnish some information not in the other; but anecdotes of books history, by the very nature of their field, have to recognize that books as physical objects are central to their concern. Their ultimate interest may be in the spread of ideas; but to understand the role of books in that process requires paying attention to the books as artifacts.

For this reason the collecting of books (as opposed to the collecting of texts) is essential to scholarship in this field, just as the collecting of all other kinds of artifacts is crucial if we are to

attempt to understand what happened in the past. Photographs or reproductions of artifacts may have their uses, but they are no substitutes for the objects themselves, and in the same way photographic copies of books cannot replace the originals. No one has any trouble seeing this point when the subject is the artistry of bookmaking: to evaluate the quality of presswork, paper, and binding naturally requires looking at them directly, just as one must look at an oil painting and not a reproduction of it. And of course the history of the book arts is a significant subject in its own right.

But another branch of book history—including the approaches now encompassed by the term *l'histoire du livre*—is concerned with books as conveyors of ideas, not with the artistry of books; and it is in this connection that many people have failed to understand how the physical books remain primary. There has been a strange reluctance to recognize that what written or printed works say is affected by the physical means through which they are transmitted. Once one does understand this point, one perceives not only that every edition of a work may differ but that every copy of every edition is a separate piece of historical evidence. No two copies are ever quite identical; sometimes the differences do not appear to have any significance, but at other times they are important, and to order to discover which situation exists in any instance one must examine copies that seem at first to be duplicates. Falconer Maden's famous phrase "the duplicity of duplicates" has been a part of bibliographical idiom for seven decades but the enormous significance of the fact it alludes to, though increasingly perceived by collectors and special collections librarians, is not yet a part of the thinking of the majority of the people who study books. It is not reasonable to expect that many assemblages of apparent duplicates—like the great collection of Shakespeare first folios at the Folger Library, or of printings of Herman Melville's works at The Newberry Library—will be formed, but their rationale and scholarly value should be more widely understood. Scholars and other readers must come to see, more than they do now, that what they read in one copy of an edition is not necessarily what is present in other copies of that edition, let alone copies of other editions. Anyone who has prepared a scholarly edition of a text can testify to this point: it is surprisingly few other people can.

Nevertheless, the connection between the meaning of a text and its physical presentation indicates the importance of the intellectual history—not just to the history of books as artifacts—of editions of original editions. The collector—whether private or institutional—is a preserver of the evidence upon which all book history must rest.

It will be clear that everything I have said—of the principles underlying "it"—applies to manuscripts as well as printed books. Indeed, those studying the "history of the book" sometimes use "book" to include manuscripts as well—especially manuscripts from before the mid-fifteenth century when they constituted the principal means for the dissemination of written works. The UNESCO volume, *The Book through Five Thousand Years* (1972), devotes considerably more than half its space to manuscripts, and the statement on book history that emerged from the Boston conference takes "books" to mean "manuscripts and printed works of all varieties." Of course, *l'histoire du livre* concentrates on the role of printed books in society and on the ways in which they differ from manuscripts; but however great those differences may be, it is important to understand the study of the history of printed books and that of manuscripts are similar pursuits. Manuscripts, being unique, are essentially different from printed books: to their manner of physical production, copies of what is supposed to be the same "book" are often not identical, either, and in any event the process is scribal copying or close transcription, not the mechanical process of printing. It follows that the study of the influence of pieces of writing has to be grounded in a knowledge of the physical media by means

of which they are preserved and unsanitized, regardless of whether those media depend on handwriting or printing type.

Indeed, all aspects of the production and distribution of reading matter are interconnected, and the progress of book history on a field of learning rests on the recognition of this axiomatized point. The kind of work now labeled *l'histoire du livre* and the kind called "analytical bibliography" may be for the most part associated with different groups of people, but both will be less fruitful than they might be if they develop independent disciplines. Darnton describes one of the pursuits of *l'histoire du livre* as "macroscopic surveys of book production," and we must be grateful that the recent interest in *l'histoire du livre* has revived attention in the study of the book industry in the large contexts of social, economic, cultural, and intellectual history. At the same time, we recognize two directions in which a true macro-study of the book must proceed. First of all, it must incorporate the analysis of the physical evidence within books and manuscripts, a study that—far from

being a bypath—leads directly to the centre, the meaning of the texts themselves. And second, the broad view of the book in one country, built up from this foundation, must be joined to similar histories based on the experience of other countries. Individual books cross national boundaries and become international commodities; so do works as they are printed (in the original language or in translation) in various countries and are subjected to the characteristic book-trade practices of those countries.

Book history requires both international cooperation and interdisciplinary communication. We cannot say that one kind of book history is appropriate for history departments and another kind for literature departments. Books have unarguably been central to the development of thought in all fields, and textual study—the study of differences between what copies of the same work say—cannot be divorced from the cultural force. Furthermore, we need to learn not to draw a line between our own use of books in the present and the situation faced by people in the

past when they used books; as responsible readers and scholars, we have to be alert to potential textual problems in the books we use, just as we have to understand how the influence of particular books in the past was affected by textual differences among copies. I am not claiming that every study of book history has to be a broad synthesis: scholarship does not grow in that way, and we must of course have specialized studies from which to construct the larger syntheses. I am only suggesting that it is not productive to compartmentalize book history in the way that we have begun more routinely to understand that the intellectual content of books is related to their physical production, we shall also understand more deeply the essential unity of the field. We have always known that the book industry is special, because its product disseminates ideas, but we shall then see how essential a knowledge of it is to understanding those ideas. We shall see that the history of books in this unified sense is central to the efforts we all make as readers to learn from the past.

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The scholar as printer

By D. J. McKittrick

HANS SCHMOLLER (Editor and Translator)
Giovanni Mardersteig
The Officina Bodoni
An Account of the Work of a Hand Press 1923-1977
28pp. Verona, Italy: Edizioni Valdonega. Distributed by Bodley Head, £22.
88 85033 04 0

When Giovanni Mardersteig died in 1977, both his name and the name of the Officina Bodoni, the press he had founded and operated for forty-four years, were familiar not only to bibliophiles and book collectors, but also to scholars in a wide range of disciplines. The subject of a major exhibition in the British Museum in 1954, his name was widely known, even to the subject of a yet grander exhibition in the British Library in 1978 and another at the Triennale in Milan in 1979.

Mardersteig was a native of Weimar, home of Count Harry Kessler's Cronach Press but his inspiration can be traced back to the English private press movement of the 1890s. Although he himself published many of the books he printed, as the "Edizioni Officinae Bodoni", and although he designed several types of his own, Mardersteig also printed for other publishers. It is a measure of how different his attitude to his own type-faces was from William Morris's that Golden-Sanderson's that his Dante type was made available both from the English Monotype Corporation and from Ruggiero Olivieri in Milan, and in 1928 Mardersteig willingly co-operated with Stanley Morison to produce the Pastonchi type-face for the Monotype Corporation.

steig's work on Felice Felletano and Luca Pacioli. He will be remembered as much for the qualities of scholarship in his books as for the unrivalled beauty of his presswork, paper, and bindings.

Much of Mardersteig's time in his last years was taken up in the planning of the present book, but he died, after lengthy illness, before it could be finished. There are, as a result, inevitable and obvious gaps. He had completed the arduous task of writing commentaries on individual titles that he felt could usefully be enlarged on, and wrote a characteristically lively piece on Gabriele D'Annunzio, whose complete works he printed with extraordinary speed in 1927-36. He also recorded as much as he knew of the French publisher Charles Malin, whose private life remained, even to his clients, an enigma: his memoir is one of the most detailed accounts we have of this genius, to whom Mardersteig's own type designs, quite apart from such other masterpieces as *Erle Gill's Perpetua*, owe so much. Of those Mardersteig types—Dante, Griffo, Zeno—there is scarcely a word here. He had planned to write what might have been his most absorbing chapters on them, but died before he could do so. The work he published elsewhere on the subject is so indicative of what might have come from that most observant of eyes and authoritative of pens.

The title-page, quite properly, gives pride of place to Mardersteig, but Hans Schmoller has been more than simply the editor and translator of this volume. His very considerable introduction gives a fuller account of Mardersteig's life and the fortunes of the press than any previous one. Many lists of its productions have appeared before, beginning with Mardersteig's own *catalogue raisonné* (in three languages) in 1929, while exhibition catalogues have been more or less complete according to circumstances. But Schmoller's bibliography, freshly compiled for this new survey, is as definitive as such things ever can be. Every book is fully described, both Mardersteig's own publications and also those printed on commission for private individuals or publishing firms. In the many cases where Mardersteig printed editions in several languages (usually Italian, German and English) each translation is given full and separate treatment.

The Officina Bodoni invites comparison with the great bibliographies of the Doves and Ashendene presses, though it differs from them in being printed by machine rather than by hand. Its contents provoke only two serious criticisms. Firstly, no less than seven separate indexes (quite apart from a supplementary list at the end of the book) make it far from easy to consult. Mardersteig's name appears separately in three of them, but the other two are published by Bodley Head, and some prior knowledge is required to trace all the books in which

John Holroyd Reece had a hand. Secondly, as well as all the books, so carefully described, a great deal of the ephemera of the press might usefully have been included.

The point at which to stop describing such minor products is not an easy one to fix, and must depend largely on the purpose of the volume being prepared. But by declining to describe even some of the ephemera this book ignores two major and legitimate expectations: no authoritative account of them has ever appeared apart from that published a little while ago by John Ryder in *The Private Library*, even though it is a field to which serious collectors have increasingly been turning. More generally, by omitting such matters, this survey leaves out a little considered aspect of the history of any press which nevertheless is the source of its livelihood: its clientele. Such items as prospectuses are not mere *bibliobooks* but a vital part of publishing history, and should be at least mentioned in any serious study. It is a pity that this magnificent book shows so little understanding of what makes private presses possible.

I use the word magnificent deliberately: all those who have been involved in the compilation and production of *The Officina Bodoni* must feel proud. After the war Mardersteig established the *Stamperia Valdonega* for machine printing, and the books printed there for many years now by his son, as well as distinctive and beautiful in their own way as those of the Officina Bodoni itself. This survey was printed at the *Stamperia Valdonega* with all the mastery one could hope for; its scale is generous, its typography (the book is set in Mardersteig's own Dante) of the same high standard that we have come so readily to assume, its text is both readable and authoritative, and as the record of books "unique in our time" (to borrow Charles Malin's encomium) it is a bargain at its price.

A Guide to Miss and Documents in the British Isles relating to the Middle East and North Africa (482pp. Oxford University Press, £6.50) is edited by J. D. Pearson but based on notes assembled by Dr Noel Matthews and M. Doreen Wainwright. This massive compilation completes the series of four volumes devoted to the manuscript resources of the British Isles for the study of the areas covered by the School of Oriental and African Studies at London University. The area covered by this final survey is defined as "the Arab countries of the Middle East and North Africa, Israel, Cyprus, Turkey, Iran and certain regions of the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Crimea".

As in previous volumes, there is a commendably wide range of coverage, embracing minor missionary societies and small regional museums (important for Crimean War materials) as well as the great institutional collections of the nation. G.N.

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The long white tabeule of nicotine and fire
Parks of the lungs browning like autumn
Like bonfire approaching
White as a peeled staff, a whitewashed path
Along which
A bonfire approaches coughing
I watch the young man being curled
Into feeling by the tobacco's analgesic
Despite their necklaces of medicines
It is like the ugly beauty of gargoyles
Through which
The blessed rain flows; it is like
The long cool violin-face of the horse, laid
Along the dry stone wall
Drinking the dry stealer's shadow like water
It is like the 50-Rigs lighted
Peppermint cities
Their seminal oil pumped from retirement in the old depths
Spill it a little
And the entire sea washes whole in one round ralebow.

Peter Redgrove

Incunabula from Baden-Württemberg

By Lotte Hellinga

P. AMELUNG:

Der Frühdruck im deutschen Südwesten 1473-1500: Ausstellung der Württembergischen Landesbibliothek. Band 1. Ulm. 407pp. Württembergische Landesbibliothek Stuttgart/DM. 89. 3 7772 7929 3

The spread of printing in Europe is reflected with remarkable accuracy in the wave of exhibitions passing through its major libraries exactly five hundred years after the invention of the process. South-West Germany should by rights have taken its turn in 1973. Fortunately however, not everyone is obsessed by the magic of a quinqucentenary. Dr P. Amelung was allowed as much time as he needed to prepare a travelling exhibition and a catalogue based on his expert knowledge of printing in South-West Germany in the fifteenth century. The result is a superbly illustrated handbook in two volumes, which puts the history of printing in this area on a new and firmer basis.

The book is restricted, for understandable administrative reasons, to printing in the modern Bundesland Baden-Württemberg. The author apologizes for this obvious enclavism, which occludes Augsburg, a city with many historical connections with the region, as well as two important, nearby, centres of printing—Strasbourg and Basle. In fact highlighting a limited area, which means concentrating on one or two centres not of the first importance, has proved to be richly rewarding.

A glance at one of the maps which indicate places of printing in the fifteenth century shows that part of the modern demarcation, with the Rhine forming the western and southern border of the state, was by no means without significance then. On the west bank of the Rhine blank areas were tolerated in the vicinity. No such isolation existed in the country east of the Rhine, where the cities of Augsburg and Ulm were the most important printing centres. The map is dotted with small places of every kind, university towns, monasteries, princely residences, and episcopal sees; where a printer made a short-lived appearance. This alone suggests that here we have to do with a rather different and less rigid world. In this land of pleasant variety we find that what is now Baden-Württemberg comprised the city of Ulm, the subject of Dr Amelung's first volume here under review, Reutlingen, Heilbronn, and Esslingen, which will be dealt with in the second volume, together with nine other, very small, centres.

Ulm, a thriving city on the Danube, was in the fifteenth century the most important town of South-West Germany after Strasbourg. Its first printer, Johann Zainer, had learned the trade in Strasbourg, as had to many other printers in the area. When starting his career he had the enthusiastic backing of Heinrich Steinhilber, the Ulm humanist. Steinhilber was the author of German versions of Boetius' *De consolatio* and Aesop, published by Zainer in editions which have become rightly famous for their illustrations. Ulm's claim to fame as a printing town derives from its rich tradition of book-illustration. Apart from the books just mentioned there are the editions of Ptolemy by Lionhard Holl and Johann Roger, the Terence, the *Book of the World* and the editions of Casparin's *Stages of Rhodes*, which all deserve their reputation as milestones in early printing.

In spite of these aesthetic triumphs, the history of printing at Ulm is a chronicle of repeated commercial disasters. Dr Amelung's use of archival material, among which the Ulm 'Schuldbuch' (record of debts) is prominent, contributes much to our understanding. Late publishing involves a high financial commitment. Dr Amelung furnishes that the frequent financial difficulties, and indeed bankruptcies, of the Ulm printers must be explained by a chronic lack of capital. They used to order those matters better in Augsburg. Risks however were usually offset by less adventurous publications. This was undoubtedly Johann Zainer's plan when, simultaneously with his courageous policy of publishing some—though relatively few—early humanist titles, he started to print a long succession of theological works in Latin, probably with the advice and support of the local Dominicans. These, often very large, folios were also most engagingly enlivened with woodcut borders and initials which give them, in spite of the universal nature of their contents, a definitely South German character. It is in trying to discover who bought these books—a curiously blind spot in Dr Amelung's otherwise extremely varied documentation—that we may detect another element which helps to explain Ulm's commercial failure in the book-trade.

Bound for the clerisy

By Anthony Hobson

F. A. SCHMIDT-KÜNSELMÜLLER:

Corpus der gotischen Lederschnittbände aus dem deutschen Sprachgebiet (Denkmäler der Buchkunst 4): 304pp. Stuttgart, Anton Hoesermann. 55 DM (480 DM to subscribers to the series) 3 777 2 8022 4

Lederschnittbände, usually translated as 'cut leather bindings', are leather bindings on which a design has been drawn in blind with a burin and outlined by punching the background. The Germans distinguish bindings decorated with inlaid ornament but with the backgrounds left plain as *Lederschnittbände*. Dr Schmidt-Künsemlüller lists each type separately, but the distinction is a rather arbitrary one. Some of the Austrian covers decorated with leafy ornament could have been classed among the *Lederschnittbände*, while at least two of the latter qualify as true *cut leather* bindings.

English readers will be surprised to find that the author claims the *Stonhurst* Gospel of St John and the *Cadmo* Evangelary in Fulda as the two earliest bindings to which the term applies. However this may be, *cut leather* bindings in the generally accepted sense first appeared in the fourteenth century. The style flourished for over a hundred years, almost exclusively in Central Europe, from the Rhineland to Bohemia and from Styria to Brunswick, disappearing with mysterious abruptness shortly before 1500. The present corpus is confined to bindings from the 'German-speaking area' (a term intended to include Bohemia) of the gothic period. It excludes the work of the English 'Scales' binder, the single Netherlandish, and the Anglo-Scandinavian specimens and the well-known Poggio manuscript in Venice probably decorated by a German craftsman (though, illogically, it includes a sixteenth-century Belgian binding with the arms of (Eugene and Croy) and avoids the question whether the Spanish *mudejar* bindings are to be considered as *cut leather* or not.

Lederschnittbände were decorated with leaves and acorns, with grotesque animals, with inscriptions and coats of arms, with standing figures of saints or of the Madonna and Child. Elaborate scenes after engravings by the Master BS are depicted on some of the later and most elaborate ones. They were always luxury objects, produced for (and often in) the great abbeys of Austria and South Germany, for prelates such as Bernhard von Rohr, Archbishop of Salzburg, or Bernhard von Kienburg, Bishop of Chiemsee, for rich clerics like Albrecht von Eyb, Canon of Bamberg, or for the patrician families of Nuremberg.

Although the subject has attracted the attention of German specialists since Loubser first listed thirty-two examples in 1904, it has not been

sample represented in the Bodleian Library, Cambridge University Library and the British Library, altogether some 140 copies, to which a few can be added from other collections. Where the early ownership is recorded, they prove with astonishing regularity to have been preserved in religious houses in South-West Germany. There is much to suggest that with the exception of the few notable illustrated books that became collectors' items early on, few Ulm books crossed the Rhine before the secularization of the monastic libraries. Trade may have been more outward-oriented, down the Danube, but there is no evidence that the books penetrated very far in that direction. Of course, many of the notes of ownership were written much later than the dates of printing, but in so far as they are early, they indicate a very limited marketing area, while the later notes point to a similar pattern of continuous preservation in monastic institutions. If this sample is not too biased by the formation of these particular collections and reflects a substantially true picture one cannot but marvel at the nature of the trade connections that served this restricted market. Can the Ulm Dominicans have acted as agents for the printer? Who would have promoted the sales to the Dominicans of Bamberg, the Augustinian Hermit Friars of Munich, the Benedictines of Weyensteyn and Tegernsee, the Carthusians of Buxheim, and the Canon Regular of St John the Baptist at Rebdorf in the diocese of Eichstätt. In any case, the distribution of books to customers was far better organized in Strasbourg, Basle and Nuremberg. That the history of printing in Ulm is a chronicle of failure, or at least partial failure, makes it no less instructive. The formula of a limited, selective market manifestly did not work any better in the fifteenth century than it did later.

This conclusion is especially valuable when it rests on so sound a basis as Dr Amelung has built. He has worked in this limited area on much more varied evidence than is usually possible and has taken particular account of archival and

other extraneous material. By this deliberately broad approach he has avoided the pitfalls of classification based on type alone which in the past has done much damage to the study of incunabula. The author's researches correct a great deal of earlier bibliographical work, one result—by no means the least important—being the demonstration that there were two Johann Zainers, father and son. His revised identifications of printers and types affect the history of printing in places outside his chosen area, notably Strasbourg. One sense when working with this book—and it certainly is a book that invites the incunabula to suit annotating many other works—the author's knowledge is greater than could be accommodated in this form. Especially in the catalogue entries proper he sometimes broaches more questions than can be answered even in this generous concept of an exhibition catalogue. Further work by him, which might also include some Strasbourg printers, is clearly to be hoped for.

omitted, even though some bear tooled ornament. Spines are only rarely reproduced, though their treatment is often helpful in recognizing a binding shop's work. The entries are arranged alphabetically according to present locations. The opportunity of grouping together the work of particular regions or supposed artists has thus been neglected. No doubt the author preferred deliberately neutral arrangements, since one based on attributions, however stimulating, would have raised numerous problems. He has provided nineteen appendices listing groups of binding associated according to different criteria.

The plates are of uneven quality, some being so dark that details are invisible. One can understand that a binding at Sopron should have had to be illustrated from an indifferent reproduction, but could not the author have insisted on clearer photographs from Stuttgart or Wolfenbüttel or the Metropolitan Museum, New York? It is sad to find both the British Library and the Bodleian among the sources of below-standard prints.

Dr Schmidt-Künsemlüller's declared purpose was to bring together all *cut leather* bindings in a corpus to serve as a basis for further research and stimulus to new discoveries. He has been entirely successful in achieving this aim. The exhaustive list of bindings and the admirable bibliography will be of the subject. It is only a matter of regret that the publication follows a recent tendency for important bibliographical works to be priced beyond the reach of most bibliographers.

Restarting the presses

By B. C. Bloomfield

GRAHAM SHAW:
Printing in Calcutta to 1800
249pp. The Bibliographical Society, London. 0 19 72792 3

India is now the third largest producer, with about 12,000 new titles and editions each year, among countries which publish books in English, but the story of the introduction of printing to the sub-continent largely remains to be told. Most previous work on the subject is usually simply descriptive and authors rely heavily on the assertions and statements of their predecessors. The outlines of the story are well known and the introduction of printing by the Portuguese has been documented by Professor Boxer as well as by Portuguese historians but the reintroduction of European-style printing in the eighteenth century by the British, French, and Danish missions at Tranquebar has hardly been studied. A. K. Erikson's *The Printing Press in India* (1958), Dr Dennis Rhodes's *India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma and Thailand* (1969), and Miss Dhill's *Early Indian Imprints*

(1964) are the only worthwhile books published and none of these can be entirely relied on. (Barnes's *The Indian Press*, 1940, while generally accurate deals only with newspaper and periodical printing).

The recent researches of M. Duverrier in Paris have not yet been published in full so Graham Shaw's *Printing in Calcutta to 1800* is the first book to display the benefits of modern bibliographical scholarship. It could perhaps be described as 'Notes towards a history of printing in Calcutta in the eighteenth century', consisting as it does of a description of the conditions and products of the press at that time, short biographies of the various printers and presses traced, followed by a comprehensive list (in EBC style) of all publications known to have been issued between 1777 (when the notation first appears in Calcutta), and the end of 1799.

Printing in Calcutta also contains a map of Calcutta, showing the location of printing offices; a genealogical tree showing how various printers merged, were taken over or whose businesses were closed in the wake of bankruptcy or death; and a number of facsimile type pages. Mr Shaw has worked through the holdings of the major

libraries in the United Kingdom and those of the National Library in Calcutta, and has studied in detail the evidence provided by the India Office Records and the advertisement columns of those newspapers and periodicals which have survived. In 1790, for example, he has traced twenty-nine items, twenty of which appear not to have survived, and this is a fairly typical year. There is a grand total of 368 items traced over the period 1777 to 1799 plus a number of untraced proposals for publication. It is clear that most printers achieved modest, though profitable, periods, and newspaper publication and the success of one needed the patronage of the East India Company to survive.

Printing in Calcutta is a model of its kind and we now need similar studies for the other presidencies of Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta. It is an attempt at a serious history of printing in the sub-continent. Undoubtedly many of Mr Shaw's lacunae will now turn up in book dealers' lists and the legend 'Not in Shaw'—such is the penalty of the pioneer—but it is greatly to be hoped that Mr Shaw will persevere with his labours and ultimately provide us with a general history of early printing in undivided India.

Unholy Russia

By Kyril FitzLyon

FRANCIS CARR:

Ivan The Terrible
230pp. David and Charles. £1.50.
0 7143 7958 5

Sometime in 1939, soon after the beginning of the war, one of our 'quality' dailies published an article suggesting that the Germans, unlike the rest of us, were descended directly from Neanderthal Man, who had been driven by his more evolved successors into the North-Western corner of Europe, there to breed the race which we were now fighting. No need to labour the obvious implications. It was, of course, an article to suit the times.

Francis Carr's *Ivan the Terrible* is a book of the same inspiration: less a biography than a peg to band a tract. The Cold War is upon us and it is useful, indeed essential, to show what Russians are really like, have always been like and, apparently, always will be like. What can serve this purpose better than to take a figure such as Ivan the Terrible and treat his life, reign and times as typical of eternal Russia? One need only draw constant parallels between the customs, attitudes and events of the sixteenth century and those of the preceding and following centuries, to reveal the unchanging character of the Russians and their rulers: crude, murderous, immoral, aggressive, unscrupulous, predatory and destructive; cannibals, too, in some parts of the country (ominously enough, only 'some 700 miles north of Moscow') let not all that far from present-day Leningrad at least up to the 17th century. Maybe even now we know? (Etymology is brought in to prove the charge, but all it proves, alas, is that the author is not etymological. Since, nevertheless, he frequently relies on etymology to make a point, this defect becomes embarrassing.)

Russians may not be ten-foot tall, but, if Mr Carr is right, they must

surely be unique: contrary to other nations, they have never evolved, have no redeeming features whatsoever and have never had any, none, at least, he finds worthy of mention. It is quite surprising, in the circumstances, that the 'predominant three features of Russian life' have been for centuries and 'have remained so to this day' the relatively mild ones of 'disregard of human rights, servility and bribery'.

All this would be bad enough if it concerned Russia alone, but it doesn't. For, 'right from the start of Russian history there has always been a triple strand of aggressive foreign policy'—Russian foreign policy, presumably—composed of armed acquisition, ethnic expansion and 'the religious or theological impulse'. (Among examples given are Catherine II's 'war with India' at the end of the 18th century and an Indian 'campaign' initiated by Paul I at the beginning of the 19th, both of them, alas, overlooked by historians). Besides, Russian rulers—ancient and modern—have for long been affected by 'massive poison' and this has always driven them to impose their rule on us much to the world as they could lay their hands on. Nor do they do it in two gentle a fashion. In the old days, back in the 10th century, 'the Russians descended like locusts' on their neighbours' lands; they are obviously no better now, though possibly they no longer out their enemies. In any case, 'every increase in the size of the Russian Empire has been followed by worsening conditions with [?] her new neighbours. The pattern is certainly constant'. Understandably enough, since Russian wars—'invariably aggressive'—have always pursued two aims only. The principal one has been plunder. The other—equally reprehensible, it seems—has been 'to establish sea ports, especially those with warm water'. The Russian background being what it is, it is only natural that this appalling notion should have produced what in other countries would be considered a monster, in the shape of Ivan the Terrible, who inherited the policy, no concept of national interests and reigned for half a century from 1533 to 1584. This was the age which

elsewhere produced Henry VIII and Philip II, but they, no doubt, were regrettable exceptions to local traditions. In Russian, they like them that way, and 'Ivan soon learnt that pity, kindness and courtesy were qualities to be despised in a Russian tsar: cruelty, arrogance and terror were more fitting'. He was no exception—merely a paradigm. The more closely his successors followed his example the more fortunate they were in their personal fate, for 'the Russians spare their tyrants; they kill only those that lack barbarity'. Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, Catherine II (sic) and Stalin, Russia's most tyrannical despots, died in their beds. 'Ivan's barbarity was, it is true, horrific by any including, I would say, Russian standards, though Carr would presumably disagree. After all, he considers even Catherine the Great to be in the same league. Anyway, he spares the reader no details of the terror and desolation visited by the semi-insane tsar upon his unfortunate country, forcing his subjects to escape, if they were lucky, 'from their unpleasantness'. Those who escaped south to Circassia were not just lucky; if they became at all like the natives, they acquired highly desirable characteristics. For there, women 'could walk around with their breasts uncovered' and these were, according to a 17th-century traveller quoted by Carr, 'like two globes, well placed, well shaped and of an incredible firmness [than which] nothing is so white and so clean'. Nothing like this in Russia where, according to another traveller, 'girls rarely remain chaste beyond the age of seven'. The overall effect of Carr's book is that of horror-comic, a strip cartoon in which Ivan's life is merely an episode, rather more closely dwelt on than the rest of the story of Russia, being the quintessence of all things Russian, it is, on the whole, more lurid. The chief events of his brutal reign, whatever their nature, are treated simply as material for blood-curdling stories or as typical examples of Russian inhumanity throughout history. Carr discerns no real Russian policy, no concept of national interests other than Ivan's reign or at any other time.

Finn against Finn

By D. G. Kirby

ANTHONY F. UPTON:

The Finnish Revolution 1917-1918
60pp. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. \$39.50.
0 8166 0905 5

At the end of January 1918, the newly independent country of Finland was plunged into civil war. A Red government was established in Helsinki, while white members of the non-socialist 'Voluntary government', swept aside by the insurgents, set up temporary headquarters in the north, the base for White military operations. The conflict lasted some three months, the turning-point coming in April with the capture by the Whites of the key town of Tampere and the landing on the southern coast of a German expeditionary force.

The scars of the civil war took much longer to heal. The standard interpretation of these events provided by the Finnish writers up to the 1960s was that the Whites had fought a war of national liberation against Red 'insurgents' and backed by Soviet Russia. It is only in the past two decades that the term 'civil war' has become generally accepted in Finland, although many historians still tend to see this upheaval in Russia as the prime cause of conflict in their own country.

A. F. Upton shares this view in part, in so far as he cannot find any deep-rooted sources of discontent in Finnish society which could have caused such a bloody civil war. He is, however, beginning to see the new independent nation. On the other

hand, he regards the civil war as essentially a Finnish affair, and not something masterminded by revolutionary Russia. The crucial decisions were taken by Finns themselves, and although events in Russia did have a direct bearing on what was, after all, a part of the old Russian Empire, the struggle for power which began in Finland in November 1917 was conducted on the assumption that the former Grand Duchy should and would have a separate national independence.

The civil war was fought by Finns, and the issues which moved them to take up arms were domestic. The Whites won not only because of their superior organization, but because their objectives were straightforward. The Reds' isoked conviction and inspiration from the outset. There was a genuine mood of uncompromising radicalism among the workers, which compelled the party leadership in January 1918 to attempt a seizure of power. But the leaders were paper revolutionaries. They shrank back from a revolutionary seizure of power in November 1917, thereby forfeiting their best opportunity to establish a workers' republic. By the end of January, their opponents were much better organized. In any event, the idea of a workers' republic or a new Soviet order was quite alien to the Finnish socialists. What they claimed to be fighting for was democracy, which had been threatened by a reactionary bourgeoisie. Their resemblance to what was happening in Petrograd at the same time.

It is now seventeen years since Upton entered the sacred wood of Finnish historiography and challenged

the assumption that Finland was swept like a drifting log into roeved conflict with the Soviet Union in 1917. His *Finland in Crisis 1940-41* aroused considerable controversy in Finland at the time, but many of his arguments have subsequently been acknowledged by Finnish historians. His latest work is also provocative, although many of the myths and beliefs which he exposes to critical scrutiny have in fact already been challenged and in some cases demolished. This, nevertheless, is an authoritative and very readable study of a tragic but important episode in Finnish history, and of a neglected aspect of the European labour movement.

The Balkan Revolutionary Tradition by Dimitrij Djordjevic and Stephen Fischer-Galton (271pp. Columbia University Press. \$26. 0 231 05098 4) is an interpretative history of the Balkan peninsula from the sixteenth-century revolt against the Ottoman Turks to the Balkan revolutions in the early twentieth century. It includes a detailed account of the formation of the modern national states. In the nineteenth century, Balkan history is the account on a systematic review of the published documentation and literature on Balkan revolutions. Dimitrij Djordjevic and Stephen Fischer-Galton demonstrate how 400 years of instability and turmoil have shaped the outcome of world history. Although the authors believe that the geographic location of the peninsula as well as the struggle for control of Constantinople, the Eastern Mediterranean sea and the Near and Middle East, were crucial reasons for continual struggle, they also claim that the historical rekindling of the region has been a primary condition of unrest.

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